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Little Nineteenth-Century Child



BY
LIZBETH G. SEQUIN





LITTLE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHILD.

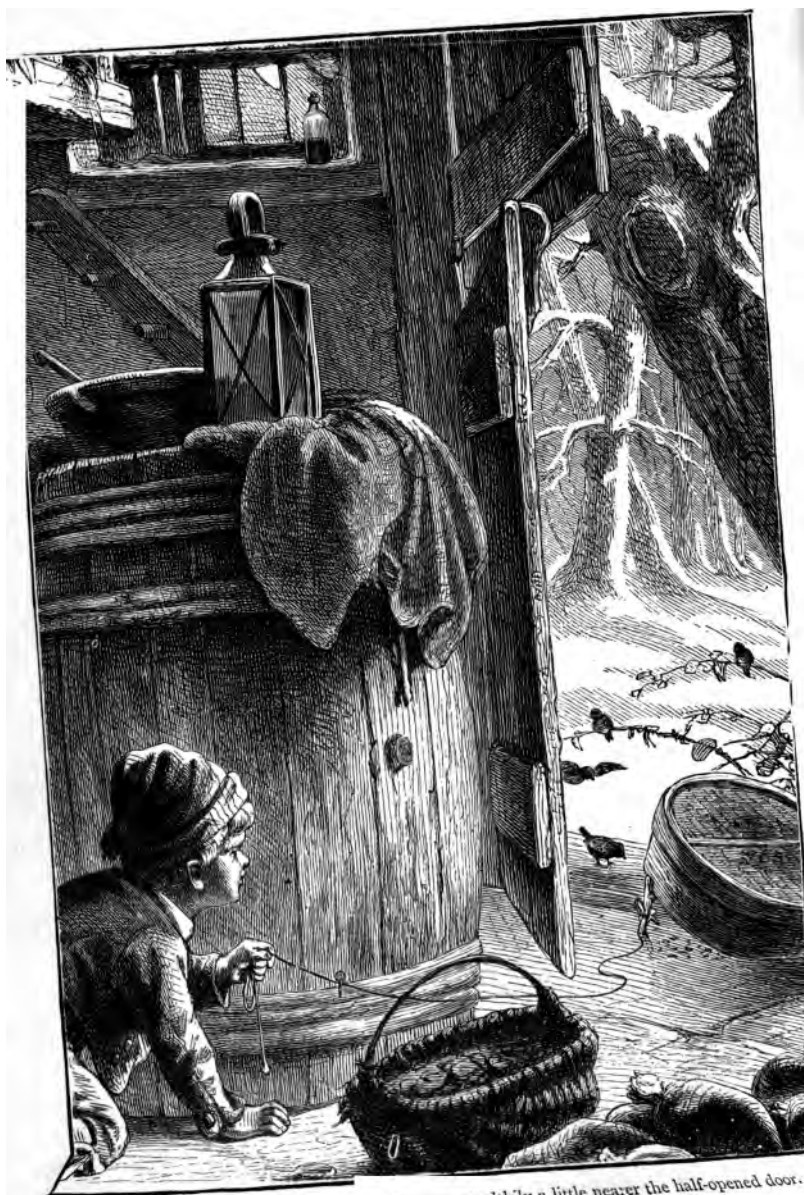




LITTLE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHILD.







Max goes on his hands and knees, and creeps stealthily a little nearer the half-opened door.

LITTLE
NINETEENTH CENTURY CHILD

And Other Stories

BY LISBETH G. SEGLIN

With Ten Illustrations



WILLIAM MULLIN & SONS

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LITTLE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHILD.

AS wet and dreary-looking a day as one could well have ; the sky lying smoothly on the tops of the chimney-pots, and the rain dripping down in a placid and contented fashion, as if it had no intention of leaving off for the next week.

Frank and Wynn timer are standing at the nursery window, flattening their noses against the panes, and finding what amusement they can in looking out.

But the prospect is not very enlivening. It consists of a damp-looking row of houses opposite, the drawing-room shutters of which are chiefly closed, and the windows of which are the reverse of clean. Beneath, in the street, is to be seen a stretch of

muddy pavement, and a portion of muddy road. On the pavement pass and repass foot passengers in every stage of dampness. In the roadway occasional vehicles plunge along in every stage of muddiness.

The children have been playing a new game of roadside cribbage for the last half-hour. "I'll take the people with umbrellas, and you shall take the people without," Frank had said, "and every woman shall count two, and a policeman five. That will be all to your advantage, Wynn timer, because they never have umbrellas," put in cunning Frank, feeling sure that the weather was far too bad for a policeman to be anywhere about.

So Wynn timer agreed, but lost horribly, because there wasn't one person in twenty who dreamed of going out on such a day without an umbrella; and except one or two little street-boys, Wynn timer really made nothing. Even then, Frank was cruel enough to insist that two boys only counted for one.

"I declare I won't play," cried Wynn timer, indignantly.

But just then she spied out, at the far end of the

street, a whole force of policemen marching along two and two.

"Two, four, six, eight, and an odd man: that makes ten, twenty, thirty, forty-five," shouted Wynn timer, pegging them off on her fingers as if her hand had been a cribbage board. "Splendid! splendid! now I'm above you, ever so far, Frank."

And when that was fully established, Frank declared that he was tired, and would leave off playing. Frank never could bear to be beaten.

"It's a stupid sort of game after all," he said. "Dear me, how I do hate wet days!"

Just then the nursery door opened and a head appeared.

"What are you about, you two?" asked a voice that belonged to the head.

The children made a rush.

"Aunt Louie—Aunt Louie! Come in!" they cried together. "You're just the very sort of person we want. We want somebody to amuse us. Come in, there's a dear, delightful auntie. We are so glad to see you."

"Well, there's nothing like being honest," said Aunt Louie, laughing. "Pray what do you expect me to do for your amusement—dance, sing, or play?"

"No, no ; tell us a story," said Wynn timer.

"Yes, a real good story," put in Frank.

And as they spoke, they pulled the arm-chair up to the fire for auntie, and settled themselves comfortably down on the floor, one on each side of her.

"Now, then, auntie, go on," said Frank, with the air of a young autocrat.

"Um," said Aunt Louie, considering, and preparing to obey quite meekly. "What story shall I tell you ? Let me see. Oh, I think I will tell you about the little girl and the wolf."

"No, no, auntie," interrupted Frank ; "that's Red Riding-hood, and we know all about her."

"That's quite an old story," put in Wynn timer. "And, besides, there are no wolves now-a-days."

"No wolves who talk, you mean," corrected Frank.

"Well, I suppose they never did—*really*—auntie, did they ?"

"Of course not," said Frank. "You can't think we ever could believe such baby-nonsense."

"I must say I think you are the most unbelieving children I ever knew," observed Aunt Louie. "When I was a little girl I believed everything I was told. I believed in Red Riding-hood's wolf quite as much as I did in Romulus and Remus, or Henry VIII., or Richard III., or any other historic personage about whose sayings and doings there can be no doubt whatever."

"Well, never mind, auntie ; go on," said Wynnie, fearing that her aunt was slightly offended. "Tell us 'Red Riding-hood' if you like."

"Oh dear, no," said Aunt Louie. "If you are so sceptical about the hero, I shouldn't think of it. Besides," with a merry little twinkle of her eye, "it wasn't 'Red Riding-hood' at all that I was going to tell you, but quite a different story altogether."

"Oh," exclaimed Wynnie, "what a pity it was we stopped you! Do go on, there's a dear darling!" coaxingly.

"Yes, do, auntie," echoed her brother.

And so Aunt Louie, after a little pressing, such as all great performers naturally require, began :—

“Once upon a time, and not so very long ago either, there was a little girl called Nineteenth-Century Child. But as that was a very long name, and inconvenient to call when one was in a hurry, and as her papa and mamma and most of her friends always were in a hurry, they shortened it, for convenience sake, to Penelope Anne.

“Now Penelope Anne was a very clever little girl, very sharp and very knowing—quite a modern-improvement child, in fact, and as unlike the little girls of the good old story-books as it was possible to be. It was very difficult to take Penelope Anne in. She knew so much about everything, and she was altogether such a remarkably wise child, that she sometimes knew better even than her papa or mamma, which is the very latest development of the modern infant.

“One day Penelope Anne’s mamma sent her with a little basket, in which was a small pot of calf’s-

foot jelly, to a poor old woman in the village who was ill.

“‘You may go alone, if you like,’ said her mamma. ‘It is such a very little distance, I don’t think you can come to any harm.’

“‘I should think not, indeed, mamma,’ said Penelope Anne in reply, for she thought she was quite capable of taking care of herself. All the same, she was rather proud of being allowed to go alone.

“She popped on her hat in a moment, and was ready to set off.

“‘Now then,’ said her mamma, ‘here is the basket; take it carefully. Don’t drop the jelly out of it, and’—smiling a little mischievously—‘don’t go loitering by the way, or you may meet Red Riding-hood’s wolf and get into mischief.’

“Penelope Anne laughed, and tossed her little head.

“‘As if anybody believed in those ridiculous nursery tales now-a-days!’ she said. ‘I should hope we know better.’

“So off set Nineteenth-Century Child with her basket, in all the pride of her wisdom

" 'When mamma talks like that,' she said to herself as she walked along, "she must really think that I am one of those little girls one reads of, who believed in all sorts of nonsense, and who, I daresay, couldn't see that musical-boxes were only clockwork, and that pantomime-fairies were only girls dressed up and painted. In these times to talk of Red Riding-hoods and Jack Giant-killers, and all the rest of them, is too absurd.'"

"While thus talking to herself she was passing through a small plantation which separated her papa's land from the village.

"Just as she had finished her last sentence, she heard a low growl coming from among the shrubs beside her.

"Penelope Anne started.

" 'There is a dog there, I think,' she said. And she looked in the direction from which the sound came. 'Fox, fox!' she called, 'is that you?'

"But, instead of 'Fox,' as she spoke, there sprang forth, from behind the shrubs, a great brown wolf, as big as three Newfoundland dogs rolled into one.



... of whom you have heard in the affecting story of 'Kesa Kiua-g H od.

“Penelope Anne was certainly very much startled, and the idea at once struck her, that the creature must have made its escape from the Zoological Gardens in London, which she had visited when she was staying with her cousins.

“‘Oh!’ she said in her fright, ‘wherever did you come from?’ This she said to the wolf, scarcely knowing what she was about, for of course she was a great deal too wise and sensible to imagine that the wolf would understand her. Great, then, was her surprise when the wolf, addressing her, said,—

“‘Ah, Miss Nineteenth-Century Child, there you are at last! I’ve been waiting for you ever so long.’

“The sound of the voice at once restored Penelope Anne’s composure.

“‘Oh!’ said she, in a relieved tone, ‘I see there is some trick here. Pray who are you, Mr. Wolf?’

“‘I,’ said the wolf, ‘am that same animal of whom you have doubtless heard in the affecting story of “Little Red Riding-hood.”’

“At this Penelope Anne laughed. ‘Nonsense!’ said she. ‘I don’t know who you are, but I’m sure

that isn't true. We children of now-a-days are a great deal too clever to believe all those rubbishy old tales.'

" 'Really!' said the wolf, in a delighted tone. 'Do you mean, my dear Miss Nineteenth-Century Child, that though you see me, you don't believe in me?'

" 'Certainly I don't,' said Penelope Anne. 'I have been better educated, I should hope, than to believe all I either see or hear.'

" 'Ah!' exclaimed the wolf with a scream of delight. And at the same moment there was a sort of gun-powder flash which made Penelope Anne wink her eyes, and when she opened them again, the wolf was gone, and in his place stood a beautiful green and gold fairy.

" Penelope Anne certainly was very much astonished now.

" 'Thank you, my dear Nineteenth-Century Child,' said the fairy. 'You have relieved me from a horrible oppression under which I have suffered for ages. A cruel ogre, whom I unhappily offended

centuries ago, gave me the form of this ugly wolf, and vowed I should never be released from the hateful spell, until I could find a little child and an old woman in one, who was too clever by half to believe in me, even when she saw me. For ages I have been wandering about looking for this curious child. I have even been over to America once or twice, hoping that I might discover her there, but even there the little children were not *quite* advanced enough for me. I can't be sufficiently thankful to have met with you.'

"'Oh! well,' said Penelope Anne, drawing herself up rather proudly, 'I am sure if I have been of any service to you, my poor fairy, I am very pleased. I certainly do think, as you say,'—though the fairy hadn't said it—'that the human race is improving. We are getting more clever than we used to be, and by the time we have properly instructed our papas and mammas, the world generally will be very much better arranged than it is at present.'

"As Penelope Anne spoke she gave her head a little toss, which she had rather a habit of doing.

But as she did so, it struck her that there was something rather unusual about her head, or rather about her hair.

"Usually, as she tossed the head, the hair, which was long and wavy, flopped down on her shoulders with rather a bump. But there was no bump now.

"Instinctively she put her hand up to the back of her neck, but strange to say, there was no hair to be felt. She couldn't make it out.

"'What's the matter with my hair?' she said, feeling her head at the same moment.

"To her utter surprise she felt, at the back of her head, a tiny little screw of hair tightly done up under her hat. She pulled it down, and one or two hairs came into her hand.

"What was her astonishment to find that they were grey!

"She looked at her hand too. To her recollection it had always been pink, plump, and dimpled. To her extreme horror, she found that it was now yellow and wrinkled, with blue veins showing all over it, like the hand of a woman of seventy!

"Penelope Anne was really getting quite alarmed.

"'What has happened?' she cried; and her voice, as she spoke, sounded to herself like somebody else's, it was so harsh and cracked. 'Dear! dear! what can be the matter?'

"Her words did not even seem to come naturally out of her mouth, but her tongue rolled about in the most extraordinary fashion.

"She put her hand up to it, and to her intense horror discovered the cause of her discomfort. *She had lost all her teeth!* Instead of the double row of little pearls that had been there half an hour ago, there were left only two jagged front teeth and three stumps quite at the back.

"Penelope Anne let drop her basket, jelly-pot and all, and burst out crying.

"'What is the matter?' asked the fairy, who had been watching her all the while.

"'What have you done to me?' cried poor Penelope Anne. 'You cruel, cruel creature! I feel sure that you have changed me like this; and it is very ungr—ungrateful indeed of you,' she sobbed, 'when

"This was not consoling to Penelope Anne's feelings. She sobbed more than ever.

"She wrung her⁴ withered old hands together. 'What am I to do?' she cried, in her croaky old voice. 'Must I be an ugly old woman all my life?'

"'Ah!' said the fairy. 'No—an idea strikes me. I think you can grow out of it if you like. But would you like?'

"'Of course I should,' said Penelope Anne.

"'But to accomplish this,' said the fairy, 'you will have to become a real child. You will quite have to give up the notion of being wiser and cleverer than other folks, and to teach yourself that instead of knowing a great deal more than the rest of the world, you know a great deal less—which is in fact the case,' added the fairy, with more candour than politeness. 'You will have to be very obedient and submissive to your papa and mamma, and in fact to everybody who is older than yourself. You will have to believe every single word that is said to you, just like the old story-book children whom you used to despise so

much, until at last you come to believe in "Jack the Giant-killer," and all the rest of the dear old nursery tales, including of course my friend "Red Riding-hood" and her wolf. And when you have done all this, and have so by slow degrees grown a simple child's heart and an innocent child's mind in you, and when you are quite persuaded that your mamma knows better than you do about every possible thing under the sun, then you will change back again from an ignorant, foolish old woman, such as you are now, into a real, true, lovable child, such as you were meant to be from the first.'

"'Oh! dear me!' sighed poor Penelope Anne. 'There seems a great deal to do. But I will try,' she added, with the big tears rolling down her wrinkled old cheeks.

"So she went straight home and tried. For the fairy kindly promised to drop the pot of jelly at the old woman's door for her.

"When she reached home, you may imagine how astonished her mamma was to see the change which had taken place in her little girl's appearance.

"The first thing that Penelope Anne did was, of course, to tell her mamma all that had happened.

"When all was told—'And now, dear mamma,' said Penelope Anne, 'will you help me to do what the fairy said, and teach me to be a real good little girl, instead of a stupid, conceited, ignorant old woman, as I used to be?'

"It was very curious that no sooner were these words out of Penelope's mouth, than one front tooth came in and ever so many hairs turned from grey to gold colour.

"'Yes, darling, of course I will help you,' said her mamma, 'if you wish.'

"So Penelope Anne tried her very hardest to grow, as the fairy had said, a true child-heart and child-mind within her.

"And after a while it was wonderful what an effect was produced. The wrinkles smoothed gradually out of her face; her teeth came one by one, prettier and more pearly than ever; her grey hair turned into a mass of shining yellow silk; so that by the time she had become quite childlike, and had learned,

among other things, to delight in the old fairy fables she used to despise, and counted 'Puss in Boots' and 'Red Riding-hood' among her dearest friends—by that time she had grown into one of the prettiest little girls imaginable.

"But all her life long she had to be extremely careful. For even when she grew up, if ever she found herself thinking herself cleverer or better than other people, out would drop a tooth on the spot, or a great bit of her hair would turn white, or a crow's-foot would come under her eye,—all of which were very unpleasant circumstances, particularly if they occurred at a dinner party.

"But by the time she had reached womanhood she had learned so much, and to such good purpose, that she very seldom fell into these errors, so that, fortunately for her, these little accidents were not of frequent occurrence.

"And this," said Aunt Louie, "is the end of my tale, which you, you impertinent and unenlightened children, actually thought was going to be nothing

better than that stupid worn-out old fable of 'Red Riding-hood.' "

"Aunt Louie!" said Frank, "you are laughing at us."

"Laughing?" said Aunt Louie, pressing her lips together so as to look very grave indeed. "I wouldn't venture to do so, for the world. I know you nineteenth-century children would correct me at once for bad manners."

"Oh, auntie!" exclaimed Wynnie.

"I'm glad, though, you think we know what good manners are," said Frank, mischievously.

"Monkey!" returned his aunt, laughing, while she pretended to pinch his ear, "you are too clever by half."

THE GREAT MAGICIAN.

ANOTHER OF AUNT LOUIE'S FAIRY TALES.

I.

"AUNT LOUIE, what *do* you think?" said Wynnie Lesley one day, seizing on her aunt the moment she entered the house.

"I think a great many things," said Aunt Louie.

"No, no,—but, auntie, I've something to tell you, you know."

"I didn't know, but I'm most anxious to hear. What is it?"

"Oh! it's so nice. Only think, auntie: I'm going to have a governess—a regular governess—and she's coming to-morrow."

"Really," said Aunt Louie.

"Yes," went on the little girl very excitedly, "and we're not going to have a nursery any more. It's all altered and different, and it's to be *my* study. Not schoolroom, you see, because there's only one person to go to school in it, that's me—and mamma says *one* doesn't make a school ; so it's to be *my study*. Dear me ! Doesn't it sound grand and grown-up ?"

"It does indeed, Wynn timer. You're getting such a big, grown-up woman, that you make me feel quite old."

"Do I ? But, auntie, I wish you'd come up and see the study. It is so nice and pretty."

"My dear," said her mamma, "why do you want to drag your aunt up all those stairs just to see a bookcase and an inkstand ?"

"No, mamma dear. But that isn't nearly all : there's the new carpet, and the new mahogany table, and—— Oh ! auntie," very appealingly, "*do* come."

"I never saw such a child," laughed Mrs. Lesley. "As long as a thing is new—it does not matter in the least what it is—it is sure to be charming. It is

to be hoped that the arrangement will be equally delightful a week hence."

"You will come up, won't you, auntie?" Wynn timer is saying, at the same time taking her aunt's hand and trying to pull her to the door.

"Oh yes, I'll come if you like," is Miss Lesley's good-natured answer.

They make their way up flight after flight of stairs, Wynn timer scampering on in front like a young goat, and chattering—like a young chatterbox.

The door of the study is closed. "And now," says Wynn timer, very much excited, "you must shut your eyes tight, and let me lead you right into the middle of the room, and then you can tell me whether you were ever so surprised in your life."

This small performance is duly gone through with great seriousness on the part both of aunt and niece.

"Now you may open your eyes," cries Wynn timer; "look about—do you know where you are?"

"No, indeed," says Aunt Louie, looking round her with an air of astonishment; "I haven't the remotest idea. If it wasn't for that map of Great Britain

hanging up there, I should really think that the fairies had carried me off into some unknown place."

"You never were in this room before, were you, auntie?" says Wynn timer, dancing about in great delight at the success of her experiment. "Isn't it nice? Do look at the new carpet, and the new bookcase, and the new paper on the walls, and the curtains, and the new table, and the new inkstand. You'd never think it was the old nursery now, would you?"

"You haven't done away with your doll's house, I see, Wynn timer; that and the high fender are the only old friends left."

"Why, no; mamma said this fender would do, though I can't say I think it is pretty," says Wynn timer, reflectively; "and as for the doll's house, I thought I might, perhaps, like to play a little with it sometimes, you see; but I've put it rather up in the corner, where it doesn't show much. You don't think the doll's house makes it look like a nursery, do you, auntie?" in rather an alarmed tone.

"Oh dear, no, not in the least. I don't object to it," returned Aunt Louie; "and I'm glad to see you

have not turned away all the old nursery pictures either," looking up at the walls. "There, I see, are our old playmates, Red Riding-hood and Little Goody Two-shoes, standing guard over the map of Europe, and the Butterfly's Revels taking place right on the top of the United Kingdom."

"Ah!" said Wynnie, "do you know, auntie, we kept them there all on your account, because we know you are so fond of the old fairy tales and things?"

"Did you really? Well, it was a most delicate attention on your part, I must say; and as I am your godmother as well as your aunt, you were quite wise to try and propitiate me. I might even yet turn out to be a fairy godmother; and then, supposing you had ever offended me, woe betide you!"

"But I don't think you are likely to turn out a fairy now, auntie."

"There's no knowing, my dear, what may happen in this world," says Aunt Louie, sententiously: "such very unlikely things do take place. Anyhow, I am very glad you don't wish to turn the fairies out of the schoolroom——"

"Study, Aunt Louie!"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, *study*, I should say,—because I am quite sure there are several little fairies who would be found extremely useful in it."

"Are there, auntie? What are they?"

"Well, Wynn timer, I've no time to stop talking about them to-day; but if you can't find out for yourself, I will tell you about them the next time I come. Now I think mamma is waiting for me to go out with her, so I must run down again. In the meantime, dear child," said Aunt Louie, kissing her little niece, "I wish you all good luck in your new quarters."

"And you do think the 'study' is very nice, don't you, auntie?"

"I think it's simply perfect," returned Aunt Louie.

II.

ONE afternoon, nearly a week later, Miss Lesley again paid a visit to her brother's house.

"How's Wynn timer getting on with her governess?"

she asked Mrs. Lesley. "Has the charm of the new 'study' gone off yet?"

"Oh dear!" returned Mrs. Lesley, in a tone of genuine distress; "I assure you I am quite worried about the child. She does not seem able to get on at all. The fact is, though she is by no means wanting in ability, she has no application, and a very small stock of patience, and so regular study is hard work to her. To-day, matters have come quite to a crisis. It seems that after being very troublesome and inattentive all the morning, she finished matters by deliberately overturning the inkstand in a fit of impatience; in consequence of which freak she is under sentence of banishment to the schoolroom all the afternoon, with a French verb and some sums for a distraction, instead of going out with me."

"Poor little Wynnie!" said Aunt Louie. "Only think of French verbs and arithmetic on this lovely summer afternoon. The inkstand will be avenged indeed."

"But you know," said Mrs. Lesley, "I can't allow her to give way to these fits of temper."

"Or to fling inkstands about. No, I suppose that would be an inconvenient habit to get into."

"Yet it makes me wretched to think of the child sitting up there in disgrace, all alone," said Mrs. Lesley; "and indeed I feel there are excuses to be made for her. I am afraid I have rather spoiled her, to begin with; and then if she is anything like me I don't wonder at figures irritating her. They always do me."

"But not to the extent of upsetting inkstands, I hope?"

"Well, no, it is to be hoped not. That's an aggravated form of the complaint."

"May I run up and see the child?" asked Aunt Louie presently.

"Yes, if you like. Perhaps you may be able to give her a little talking to. You are her godmother, and so ought to see after her morals."

III.

A FEW minutes later Aunt Louie put her head into the "study."

"May I come in?" she asked.

Wynnie was sitting at the table, with her elbows upon it, and her head in her hands, looking the very picture of woe—or rather, the reality of it, which is a great deal worse.

She looked up as her aunt entered, but did not move.

"Why, Wynnie child, what is the matter?" asked Aunt Louie, coming up behind her, and putting her hands on the little girl's shoulders.

"Oh, auntie, everything's the matter," says Wynnie, dismally, "and will be, so far as I can see, till I'm grown-up and able to do what I like. As for these things," pushing away a slate and some books impatiently, "I can't do them, and there's an end of it."

"Nonsense," said Aunt Louie, smiling; "that's only the beginning of it. If you knew all about everything, and could 'do' everything, as you say, why, what would be the good of learning? You'd be able to teach Miss Kent, instead of Miss Kent teaching you."

"Then I suppose it is that I am stupid, auntie," said Wynnie, rather doggedly.

"No, I don't think you're very stupid, dear, except when you go upsetting inkstands, you know, as you have evidently been doing, by the stains on your frock and fingers."

Wynnie blushed.

"I meant to do that, though," she said ; "I was so cross, that it seemed to do me good."

"Oh, Wynnie !"

"Well, auntie, you see nothing would go right ; and so——"

"As you were upset, you saw no reason why the inkstand should not be upset too. Well, I must say you were a stupid little girl to think that two wrongs could ever make a right. What a pity you didn't call for the fairies instead ! If you'd been Gretchen, you'd never have got the coffee made."

"What do you mean, auntie ?" said Wynnie, with a sigh, leaning her head wearily against her aunt's shoulder. "What fairies ? and who was Gretchen ? and what about the coffee ? Is it a story ? Do tell me."

"I don't think you're good enough to have stories told you to-day. Eh, Wynn timer?"

"Oh yes, auntie," coaxingly. "Perhaps the story will make me *gooder*, don't you see? And besides, you promised the other day to tell me about some fairies, didn't you, auntie? Are these the same fairies you were talking about then?"

"Yes," said Miss Lesley, taking a seat beside her little niece—"the very same. When you were so delighted with your new 'study,' the other day, and all your new arrangements, I couldn't help thinking of this little German legend, and thinking, too, that unless you had a few of Gretchen's fairies to help you, you would not find things quite so bright as you expected."

"Ah!" said Wynn timer, with a deep sigh, "I did think it was all going to be so nice; and now, auntie—now—it's all so horrid, I can't tell you; but I know I shall never, never be happy till I'm grown-up like you, auntie, and haven't any more lessons to do. I—I—can't do them." And here big tear-drops fell from Wynn timer's eyes, and blotched down on the front of her frock.

"My dear, you are indeed taking a melancholy view of things ; but before you are much older, you will find out that nothing ever does turn out quite so bright as we hoped it might do, while, on the other hand, you will, I am sure, also learn that nothing is ever quite so bad as we fear that it will be. So now, believe me, if you will only dry your eyes, and cultivate the acquaintance of a few of the fairies who helped Gretchen to make the coffee, the future need not look so very black, nor the present be so very hopeless."

"But you haven't told me the story yet, auntie."

"No ; I see I have been pointing the moral before telling the tale, which is equivalent to putting the cart before the horse, and is a very unorthodox proceeding indeed. But I will begin at once. The tale, or rather legend, is from an old German cookery book, and is to be found as a recipe for making coffee. It runs thus :—

"Gretchen was a young German maiden—an orphan—who went to live as housekeeper, or maid-





In a trice the little kitchen was crowded with busy sprites.

of-all-work, or general factotum, with an uncle, who was extremely particular and fidgety about every possible thing. But if there was one thing over which he was more particular and fidgety than another, that one thing was his morning coffee. And that was the one thing that Gretchen couldn't do. It was not worse one morning than another, but never better. It was always either cold, or weak, or smoked, or behind time, or *something*; and each day Herr Onkel scolded, and grumbled, and stormed, and raged, and even swore, so that Gretchen's life became a burthen to her, all on account of the coffee-making.

"It must be presumed that Gretchen was, like you, Wynn timer, rather a stupid sort of girl, or else, unlike you, she must have been very careless or very negligent. We won't pretend to determine as to the cause of her repeated failures; but it is certain that the fact occasioned her many bitter and useless tears, and she quite made up her mind at last that she couldn't do it, that it was no good trying, and that she would never have a moment's, not to speak of a

day's, peace or happiness, so long as her uncle wanted coffee for his breakfast.

"It was just when she had reached this very melancholy state that a new light broke in upon her.

"She was sitting one morning helpless and hopeless, with her elbows on her knees and her head on her hands, the un-made coffee and the empty coffee-pot before her.

"Suddenly she heard footsteps.

"'There is my uncle now coming, and in a minute or two he will be wanting his breakfast. He's specially cross, too, I'm sure, by the way in which he is stumping downstairs. Oh dear, what *shall* I do?'

"As she cried thus in her despair, she happened to give the little finger of her left hand a long sharp pinch with the thumb and fore-finger of her other hand.

"In a moment, something like a flash of light beamed out of a distant dark corner of the little kitchen where Gretchen sat bewailing herself and the coffee, and a voice close at her ear said, 'Here I am. Why didn't you send for me before?'

"Gretchen looked up rather in alarm to see perched up on the top of a kitchen chair an ugly little manikin, with a solemn-looking face, and a conical hat all over points. On the top of his hat was a diamond as big as a plate, that shone like a star, and in his hand he held a wand, at the end of which was a bright eye, so bright that it literally made darkness all round it by way of contrast.

"'I—I didn't send for you now, sir,' said Gretchen, all trembling.

"'Yes, you did,' said the fairy—for he *was* a fairy.

"'No, sir, I assure you I did not,' Gretchen was going to say, only the fairy stopped her before she could get the words out of her mouth.

"'Don't argue with me,' said he, very abruptly.

"'No, sir,' returned Gretchen, considerably frightened by this time; 'would you—would you like to take a seat?'

"'No,' said the fairy, 'I always make a stand. You evidently don't know me. In short, you've never had much to do with me before, or you wouldn't be the poor, useless, stupid creature you are.'

"This was not pleasant for Gretchen to hear ; but she was so cowed by the fairy's manner, that she didn't venture to say a word.

"The manikin went on—

"‘My name is Determination.’

"‘Is it indeed, sir? I’m sure I’m very happy to hear it,’ said Gretchen, wishing to be polite, and not quite knowing what to say.

"‘I am a magician.’

"At this Gretchen was so terribly frightened that she would have fallen to the ground if Determination had not held her up with one of his fingers.

"‘And, now that you have sent for me at last, what do you want of me?’ he asked.

"‘Please, sir, I didn’t know I’d sent for you,’ observed Gretchen, afraid to say that she had not done so.

"‘Don’t talk nonsense,’ returned Determination, in a decided manner. ‘You pinched your left-hand little finger for five seconds and a quarter ; you can’t deny that.’

"‘Oh! I’m sure I don’t want to deny anything,’ said Gretchen, humbly.

“‘Didn’t you know,’ Determination went on, ‘that the fairies, when they wanted to make you a present at the time of your christening, couldn’t find anything to give you?’

“‘No,’ said Gretchen, ‘I never heard about it.’

“‘It’s true, though,’ said the manikin. ‘There happened to be quite a run of babies just at that time, to whom the fairies had been presenting one good gift and another; and when your turn came they were quite in despair: they looked in their riches-bags, and in their beauty-bags, and in their cleverness-bags, and every one of them was empty. What to dower you with they couldn’t think, until at last one kind old fairy, who had taken a great fancy to you, and couldn’t bear you to have nothing, declared that you should be put under the protection of the great magician Determination, and she prophesied that with his aid you would accomplish more than if you had possessed beauty, wealth, or talent; and she was right, for in truth there is very little in this world that I am not able to accomplish. Only I couldn’t come till you called me—fairies never can.’

"“I didn't know how,” said Gretchen.

““Ah! that was a pity. However, there are some things which I suppose everybody must find out for themselves. And, now I *am* here, tell me what you want.”

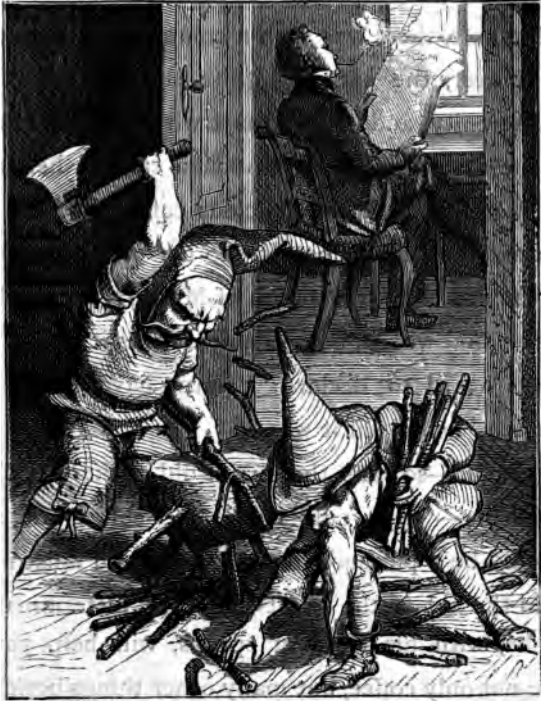
““I want,” said Gretchen, ‘to make the coffee, and such coffee as my uncle will approve of.’

““Oh! if that's all, we'll soon put you to rights,” said the mamikin; ‘and if your Herr Onkel is not satisfied with the coffee which we make for him, why, he will be a more difficult man to please than I fancy.’

“With that Determination waved his wand, and in a trice the little kitchen was crowded with busy sprites.

“Little Hardwork, a fierce-looking fellow, with a hatchet, chopped wood; Patience, bending on the floor, picked up the sticks; Humility, with a broom as big as himself, swept the chips up; Perseverance supplied the stove with the fuel; Hope, sitting on an overturned stewpan, ground cheerfully away at the coffee; old Heartiness and Goodwill brought in

pailsful of water between them ; young Courage poured the water valiantly into the hissing kettle ;



while Method, mounted on the rail of a chair, fetched the coffee-cups out of a cupboard.

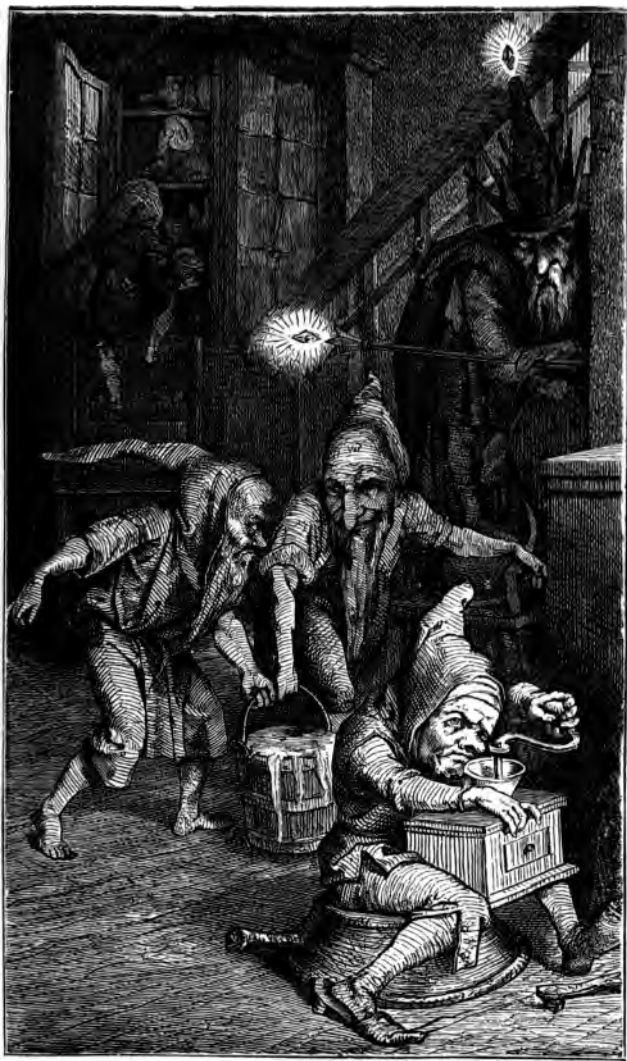
"Not a creature was idle. There was work for each one of them. And over them all, Determination their master, kept his watchful eye.

"In short, there was such a commotion in the place that Purrer, the cat, was quite startled out of her usual serenity, and stood aghast with her tail on end ; but the result was, that Gretchen carried her uncle that morning the most delicious coffee that had ever been made in the coffee-pot—to her own great relief, and the extreme satisfaction of Mein Herr Onkel.

"So good was it, and so quickly was it ready, that he was heard to declare 'it must have been made by magic,' as indeed it was.

"'But if,'—so runs the quaint old cookery book, in conclusion,—'you would have good coffee, and such as would be a pleasure to partake of, you must needs call in the aid of the great magician, Determination, and he, with his train of sprites, will help you to make not only coffee, but many other things besides.'"

Miss Lesley stopped, and seemed to wait for Wynn timer to make some remark.



Old Heartiness and Goodwill brought in pailsful of water, and Hope, seated on an overturned stewpan, ground cheerfully at the coffee,

But Wynn timer sat quite silent, apparently absorbed in thought.

"Well, Wynn timer?" said her aunt, presently.

"Auntie, do you think those fairies would come and help me?" she said.

"I am sure they would, if you only invited them, darling."

"Are those the very fairies you were thinking about the other day, auntie?"

"The very same, my dear."

"Let me see: how many were there?—Hardwork, Patience, Method, Humility, Hope, Heartiness, Goodwill, and Courage. Were those all, auntie? It seems to take a great many fairies to make coffee, doesn't it?"

"You have forgotten Perseverance," said her aunt, "and he is one of the most important fellows of them all. Unless he kept the fire up, the labours of the rest would be in vain."

"I wish they would come and help me with my lessons," said Wynn timer, with a piteous little face.

"They are all under the control of that old

magician, Determination, my love. If you get hold of him, or he gets hold of you, it will be all right."

"But how am I to get hold of him?" asked Wynn timer.

"Do you think if I were to pinch my little finger for five seconds and a quarter that he would come?"

"I feel pretty sure that if you were to try it, making good resolves all the while, that before the five seconds were over he would have come to you. You might not be able to see him. Fairies don't show themselves openly now-a-days, but they work their silent wonders all the same in the hearts of those who are willing to receive them."

"Auntie," said Wynn timer, "I'm pinching my finger."

"That's right," said Miss Lesley; "I feel sure Determination will come in a minute or two—particularly if you make good resolves all the while. For I should have told you one thing of which you should be careful. Determination has a cousin not unlike himself at first sight, who is no good fairy, but an evil genius. His name is Obstinacy; and it is a terrible thing to get into his power, for he is a great tyrant, leading people they don't know

where, nor he either, for he is as blind as a mole. Sometimes he tries to pass himself off for his cousin Determination; but one need never make a mistake between the two, because the good magician has always a bright shining light upon his head, the name of which is Duty, and at the end of his wand a watchful eye, which he keeps perpetually turned on his sprites, to see that they do their work."

"Auntie," said Wynnie, "do you know, I really think Determination has come, though we can't see him. I wonder now whether he could help me to get this sum right?" pulling the slate towards her.

"I believe he could, if he has brought Perseverance and Goodwill with him," said Miss Lesley, looking over the slate too. "It's the last figure that's wrong, dear," she continued. "Get Determination to help you to add that one column up once more, and the sum will prove beautifully."

"Will it really?" Wynnie's face brightened. "But then there's that horrid old verb to do."

"Yes, that's true. But Determination will be sure to have brought all his court with him; and if you

set Patience, Hope, and Courage to work at it, I believe you'll get it done in ten minutes."

Wynn timer smiled. "Do you think so, auntie?"

"I do indeed. Now, suppose I go down to mamma for a quarter of an hour, and come back again at the end of that time, do you think the fairies will have got through their labours by then?"

"Well, we'll see," said Wynn timer, setting Goodwill, Courage, and Method to work at once.

Miss Lesley smiled and went away.

IV.

"WHAT have you been about all this while?" asked Mrs. Lesley of her sister, when she rejoined her in the drawing-room. "Have you been doing Wynn timer's lessons for her?"

"No, indeed, I assure you. I have only been introducing her to a few little fairies of my acquaintance."

"Like the fairy godmother and aunt that you are," said Mrs. Lesley, smiling.

"I should like to be one to the child, if I could," was Aunt Louie's answer.

A quarter of an hour later Miss Lesley again put her head into the study.

Wynnie sprang towards her.

"Oh, auntie," she cried, "I must have had ever so many of the fairies here, for the sum's come right, and I've written *ecrire* out without splotching it a bit. And now I may come down, mayn't I?"

"Yes, mamma says so, if you've finished your work. But I hope you've given my friends the fairies an invitation for to-morrow morning."

"Oh yes, that I have—you dear auntie. What a good thing it is to have an auntie who has fairy friends!" cried Wynnie, as she skipped lightly down the stairs by Miss Lesley's side, all brightness and smiles.

The troubles of childhood, heavy as they may be at the time, are happily not lasting. Behind the April storm-clouds lives the sweet spring sunshine, and on the slanting April sunbeams, and through the patter of the April showers, the fairy people find their way to earth.

To-morrow, Midsummer-day, the 24th of June, will be May's birthday—her tenth—and she is going to have a party. So all this afternoon she has been in a state of the greatest possible excitement, thinking about, and making preparations for, the great occasion.

Among other things, of course the croquet hoops must be set up. "That is most important, May thinks.

But the setting up of croquet hoops is at any time rather fatiguing work, and under present circumstances, May certainly finds it no easy task.

Her face, as she raises it to her brother, is flushed both with vexation and with the exertion of stooping.

"I tell you it's not a bit of good putting them up to-night, May," he says.

May looks at him, her eyes very bright.

"But I want to put them up—and I *will* put them up, Cecil!" she says.

Cecil laughs. "Oh, of course you'll have your own way, Miss Obstinate—if you can get it: I know that. But you may as well put them straight, when

you are about it." And with that he turns the hoop that May has just set up, entirely crooked.

"Cecil! It is too bad of you—it really is!" cries May; and there is the stamp of a light little foot on the soft turf. "I declare," the little girl goes on, "if you behave so badly, you shall not come to my party at all to-morrow. It is *my* party, you know. I can ask the people I like, and I won't have a rude, horrid boy like you. There!"

"Anything more?" inquires Cecil, with a calm smile.

That is so provoking of Cecil, thinks May. He never will be put out of temper.

He is a terrible tease, and delights in "working May up," as he calls it; but May can never work him up in return, and so she invariably gets the worst of it.

People who lose their tempers always are at a disadvantage with people who don't. And poor May is always finding this out, yet without profiting from the discovery. By the irritation she shows, she is constantly laying herself open to Cecil's attacks;

the more worried she gets, the more placidly good-humoured does Cecil appear; and so in their disputes the much-enduring May always *seems*, at least, to be in the wrong. It must not be imagined, however, on account of these frequent skirmishes, that Cecil and May are not attached to each other: quite the contrary. They may certainly have a curious way of showing their affection, yet it exists all the same. When Cecil is away at school, or even for a whole week after the holidays begin, no more devoted brother and sister could be found anywhere, than are these two. But after they have been together a few days, Cecil's love of teasing, and May's very strong inclination to have everything her own way generally bring them into collision.

To-day Cecil has really been very tiresome, and May's patience is almost worn out.

She returns once more to her hoops, determined to say no more. And she works on very steadily for awhile, measuring and pacing, and ramming the wires down into the soft turf, utterly deaf to the advice which Cecil throws in from time to time—advice

which to follow, would be, if not destruction, certainly crookedness. She is at the last hoop now, Cecil standing by her, with the "Arabian Nights" tucked under his arm.

May gives this final hoop a little pat of satisfaction.

"There, that is done! Now, Cecil, if you dare——"

The rest of the sentence is lost.

By a sudden dexterous movement Cecil has tipped May's garden-hat completely over her face, and bonneted her.

A muffled sound of indignant remonstrance comes from under the hat; May struggles for release, but finds herself a prisoner in Cecil's firm grasp. Cecil is nearly two years older, and much stronger than May.

"Don't go capsizing over the hoops, child," he says to his struggling victim. "So you won't invite me to your party? Won't you—eh?"

May does not deign to answer. She manages to shake off the hat.

"Let me go! let me go!" she cries.

"So you won't ask me to the party?" repeats Cecil,

holding her tightly by both arms. May is thoroughly 'worked up' now.

"I'll tell you what you are, Cecil: you're a tyrant! Let me go! Do you hear? Let me go, directly!"

"My dear sister, don't excite yourself—pray don't!" says Cecil mockingly.

There is a struggle, in the course of which May releases her right hand. The next moment, it falls pretty heavily, with all the force of her indignation, upon Cecil's cheek—a good sounding blow. Cecil releases her.

He is certainly rather astonished. He is, of course, too manly to return the blow; and no observation seems to occur to him at the moment.

May, directly she finds herself free, rushes away across the lawn, rather astonished too—a little frightened, and a little ashamed.

Cecil makes a feint of pursuing her, but turns back as he sees her reach the house.

"That girl's got a spirit of her own, and no mistake!" he observes, as he seats himself on a garden

chair, and picks up the poor "Arabian Nights," which has fallen to the ground in the struggle.

He is feeling still rather hot and uncomfortable about the cheek. And May's cheeks burn too, as she flies like one pursued, through the house and up the stairs.

She stops almost breathless outside a closed door in the corridor.

"Are you dressing, Aunt Flo? May I come in and help you?" she asks.

Miss Berkeley, dressed in a loose white wrapper, and with her hair hanging about her shoulders, opens the door.

"Yes, you may come in if you like, May; but you must not hinder me. I am rather late already."

"Oh! I will not hinder you; I will help you," says May, going in. "I am so glad you have not done your hair yet, auntie, because I can hand you the hairpins, can't I?"

"Yes, dear; but what have you been doing? How very flushed and hot you look!"

"It is Cecil. He has been so tiresome. I have been putting up the croquet hoops for to-morrow, and

just as I got them all beautifully straight, he would come and put them crooked again, on purpose to tease me.'

"That was tiresome, certainly."

"Do you know, auntie," May says after a pause, as she sinks into an arm-chair beside the dressing-table, "I think boys were only made to be a trouble and a worry."

"Well, perhaps so, May, though I never looked at the subject in that light before ; but really Cecil——"

"Oh ! never mind Cecil, auntie ; he is *too* tiresome," May breaks in, fearing possibly that the "but" is the beginning of a little good advice. "You want a hairpin now, don't you, auntie—a good long one ? There it is."

May is particularly fond of assisting at her aunt's toilette, and watches with great interest the process by which the long silky coils are gradually wound about the small shapely head.

Presently she gives a deep sigh.

"Oh ! how I should like to be grown up, and have long lovely hair like yours, auntie !" she says.

Aunt Flo is just struggling with a rather rebellious tress.

"Would you?" she says, with a funny little smile.

"How old do you think I must be, before I am *quite* grown up?" May asks.

"About seventeen or eighteen, I should say."

"Let me see. I shall be ten to-morrow," says May reflectively. "Ten from seventeen—(another hair-pin, auntie?)—leaves seven or eight years, doesn't it? Oh! that is a long while, isn't it, auntie?"

"It is indeed, May. But why are you so anxious to be grown up? I should think you could not well be happier than you are."

May assents doubtfully.

"Still there are things, you know, auntie."

"Are there? What things?"

"Well, there is Cecil, for instance. If I were a grown-up young lady he would not tease me, you know."

"No, May?—I don't know. You said just now that boys were made only to tease everybody. Perhaps you mean that if he were a grown-up young man he would not tease you: is that it?"

May's hand is still tingling with its unusual contact with Cecil's cheek. Altogether she prefers to start a new subject.

"Yes, auntie. But what I mean is, I should like to be grown-up, because then I should have everything my own way, you see."

Miss Berkeley laughs a little low musical laugh.

"So you think that grown-up people have things all their own way, do you?" she says.

May is not at all fond of being laughed at.

"Why, of course," she says, rather warmly. "How often mamma says, 'This or that thing is to be done because I say so,' or 'When I speak, that is enough.'"

"Ah! I see. Another hairpin, my dear."

Aunt Flo is too much occupied with settling the flower in her hair to pay much attention to what May is saying.

"Do you like going to dinner-parties, Aunt Flo?" May asks, after a while.

"Ye—s." A little doubtfully.

"I shouldn't think you liked going all by yourself,

though, do you? Isn't it a pity mamma is not well enough to go too?"

"It is indeed, May. I wish she and papa were both going with me."

Mrs. Berkeley was an invalid, and was rarely able to bear the fatigue of society.

"Still, auntie, I suppose you like going, or you wouldn't go?" persists the little girl.

"No, I suppose not, May."

May nods her head as though to say, "There!—I told you so. You see *you* do exactly as you like." After a moment's pause she begins again:

"One thing that I don't at all like being a little girl for, is, that everybody finds fault with me."

"Do they? It has never struck me that you were particularly ill-treated."

"No, auntie—not ill-treated. But I should so like to be old enough for mamma not to say to me, 'Don't stand on one leg, May,' or 'Take your arms off the table,' and that sort of thing."

"Well, really, May, I think the best plan would be

for you not to stand on one leg, and not to put your arms on the table: don't you?"

"Oh yes! But then one must do it sometimes, you know, auntie. Only the other day, I noticed how you were standing on one leg ever so long, and nobody told you."

Aunt Flo laughs good-humouredly.

"So much the worse for me, I suppose. What was I doing?"

"Oh, you were talking to Mr. Griffith, I think,—showing him the photographs."

"Ah! Well, I am such an old lady, May, that I ought, I suppose, to be thankful I have still a leg left to stand upon. And now will you please fasten my bracelet for me?"

"How old are you, Aunt Flo?" asks May, in a mysterious tone.

"Nearly five-and-twenty, my dear."

"Well, that *is* old, certainly. Only think: twice-and-a-half as much as I am! Do you remember what you did when you were ten years old, auntie?"

"Some things."

"Oh ! do tell me !" pleads May.

"Not to-night, dear. I really haven't time. Look at my watch, and tell me what time it is."

May considers a moment or two.

"It's five—ten—fifteen—twenty minutes to eight, auntie. Only think, now," she adds after a pause, "of your going out to dinner at almost my bedtime ! That's another thing I should so like to be grown up for ! I——"

A knock at the door interrupts May's oration. Mrs. Berkeley's maid, a bright-eyed, neat little Welshwoman, enters the room.

"If you please, miss, the carriage is at the door—and indeed, the mistress, she thinks you should be starting," she says. "Is there anything that I can do for you ?"

"Well, Jane, Miss May has been helping me so nicely that I don't think you can do much for me."

May's face looks very bright at this. But of course Jane finds out that there is a pin wanting in Aunt Flo's sash. "Tiresome woman !" thinks May. Still

May feels that she can really take all the credit of her aunt's toilette to herself.

"And you do look so nice, auntie!" she exclaims, when all is done. And that last pin or two did not make much improvement, that May could see. "I am sure no one at the dinner-party will look half so pretty as you," says the little girl.

"That is because you love me, May."

"Yes, and because I do think blue silk the very prettiest dress in the world. How I wish—— Oh! I'm coming too," as her aunt prepares to say good-night to her. And May scampers down the stairs three at a time, so as to be the herald of her aunt's approach.

CHAPTER II.

GOOD-NIGHT.

LIKE a small whirlwind May bursts into the dining-room where her father and mother are seated at dessert.

"Mamma, Aunt Flo is going now. Do look at her! I dressed her. Isn't she lovely?" cries the little enthusiast, in a great state of pride and admiration.

"Come in, Flo; come in and let us look at you," says Mr. Berkeley in his cheery voice. "Yes, you certainly do look well, and are a credit to your tire-woman," he adds, after inspection. "But it is time you were off, I think."

He rises, gives his arm to his sister, and puts her into the carriage—May following them. Father and daughter watch the carriage drive off.

"And now, papa, give me your arm, as if I were a grown-up lady. Will you?" says May.

Mr. Berkeley complies; and the two march back to the dining-room in very correct style, only that Mr. Berkeley has to stoop a little, for the lady's convenience.

"Don't I look like a grown-up lady now, mamma?" asks May, as they enter the room. Mamma smiles.

"Yes, you really have only to grow a very little bit," she says.

"And mend your manners rather," observes somebody with his mouth full. This, of course, is Cecil, who is seated at the table, with a large plate of strawberries before him. He looks up at May with a rueful face, and gives his cheek a rub.

May reddens a little, but will not understand the allusion.

Cecil says no more, but recommences his attack on the strawberries. Another plateful is waiting beside him for May.

"Now, my dear," says Mrs. Berkeley, "come, and eat your fruit. It is nearly your bedtime."

"Already, mamma! Oh! mayn't I sit up a little bit to-night? You know I am very, very nearly ten years old to-day. Am I not?" pleads the little girl.

"A very good reason for going to bed betimes, fairy," observes papa. "You are really getting so dreadfully old, that if you don't take the greatest care of yourself, all the curl will come out of your hair."

"Oh!—papa! But, mamma, do say that when I am ten I may sit up till half-past eight. Edith and Nelly do; and Nelly is not so old as I am. Will you—will you, dear little mamma?"

May gets up and puts her arms coaxingly about her mother's neck.

It is hard to resist the appeal, and Mrs. Berkeley smooths her little daughter's soft hair caressingly; but she will not relent.

"No, dear; I think eight o'clock quite late enough for you at present."

"But why, mamma?"

"My dear, I will not be asked why. Because I say so."

May gives herself a little mental hug. "There!" she thinks, "isn't that what I said to Aunt Flo? Mustn't it be nice to be grown-up and talk like that!"

But she only gives voice to a deep sigh; and turns round to the dinner-table to find the best of her strawberries transferred to Master Cécil's plate.

"Oh you greedy boy!" she cries. "Mamma, is Cecil to eat all my strawberries?" Her voice is a little shaky, and the tears are very ready to spring to her eyes.

"No, certainly not. Give them back at once, Cecil," says Mrs. Berkeley. "I won't have you tease your sister."

Cecil makes haste at once to obey his mother—observing, however, in a low tone, "Why, what a baby you are, to be sure, May! Who would expect a grown-up young woman to be crying after strawberries!"

This was too bad, because Cecil knew very well that it was not about the strawberries that May was inclined to cry.

She feels very indignant, and but for the restraining presence of her father and mother would certainly attempt a reprisal. As it is, she gulps down her rising tears and her strawberries together, and says nothing.

"Well, my Midsummer fairy, and so you are going to have a birthday and a party to-morrow?" presently observes Mr. Berkeley, as he pours himself out a second glass of claret.

In a moment May forgets all her troubles in this delightful anticipation. "Yes, papa."

"And what is to be the order of the day, little lady? Blind man's buff, and puss in the corner—eh?"

"Oh no, papa dear! In this hot weather?—only think! No. First of all we are going to play croquet, and then afterwards we are to have tea in the woods,—a real picnic, papa, with a real gipsy kettle, and all of us sitting on the ground. Won't it be charming?"

"Oh—delightful!" says papa. "Real gipsy tea out of a kettle, did you say? It's well for you to be a midsummer fairy princess! I never have such

treats on *my* birthday. In fact, I don't think I've had a birthday at all for a long time past: have I, mamma?"

Mamma smiles.

"That is because you are such an old, old man," says May, pulling away at papa's whiskers, from his knee, where she has perched herself.

"Then I hope, Fairy, you'll be kind enough to treat my grey hairs with respect. And how old do you say you are going to be to-morrow? Five?"

A severe tug at the whiskers.

"Oh, papa, you are *too* bad! I shall be ten—ten—ten!" May cries, clapping her hands.

"Dear me! How time flies, to be sure! It scarcely seems more than a year or two ago since the fairies brought you to me, May; and you will be a grown-up young lady, I find, before I know where I am."

"I wish I was a grown-up young lady, papa. How nice it would be, now, if I were going to be eighteen to-morrow Aunt Flo says that I shall be quite grown-up when I am eighteen."

"Why! do you want to be too big to sit on my knee?" asks papa. "You will be very soon, I can tell you."

"No, no, dear papa; but think how nice it would be to be going out to dinner at eight o'clock, like Aunt Flo, instead of——"

The allusion certainly was unfortunate, though May stops just in time. Mrs. Berkeley finishes the sentence for her, however.

"——' Instead of going to bed.' Yes, May; it is quite time you were off. Say good-night."

Cecil explodes in fits of laughter.

"That's the best thing I've heard for a long time," he says.

"Do be quiet, Cecil!" rather angrily from May. "Just one minute, mother darling—one little minute. I want to ask papa something *very* particular."

"Well, be quick about it, my dear."

Papa lends a most attentive ear.

"Papa, I want to ask you, was I really a fairy baby? Did the fairies bring me to you?"

"Why, of course they did. Are you not our little

fairy Midsummer May? Don't you see, your birthday is to-morrow—that is, Midsummer-day—and I assure you it is a known fact that ever since the days of good Queen Bess, all little girls and boys whose birthdays are on Midsummer-day are the special pets and favourites of the fairies; and more than that—they always get horribly spoiled by their papas and mammas; which accounts for many things. And now, having explained the matter fully, go to bed, fairy, directly, as mamma tells you. Do you hear?"

May lingers a little.

"But, papa, if I am really a fairy child, I ought to have a godmother. Don't you see?"

"A godmother! Why, of course you've a godmother. What does the child mean?"

"Oh! I know: Aunt Flo, and all that, papa; but I mean a *fairy* godmother. I never heard of a fairy child that didn't have a fairy godmother before, and a wand."

"Oh! a wand?" says papa.

"Yes; a wand that will make everybody do exactly as you like, you know."

"Umph! a godmother and a wand! Well, as to the godmother I am not quite sure, though I think it highly probable you have one, or indeed, any amount of them. As to the wand, I think it's pretty certain you've got that, May."

"Oh, papa! do you really?"

Here mamma breaks in.

"Come, May, you must go to bed now—at once. Say good-night."

"Yes, mamma. Will you tell me about the wand another time, papa?—to-morrow?" May asks, anxiously.

"Yes, yes, if you do as mamma tells you now."

The good-nights are said at last, and May's hand is on the handle of the door.

Once more she turns back.

"Mamma, may I wear my blue silk—my new frock—to-morrow?"

"No, dear, I think not."

"But I do so want to wear my blue silk, mamma."

"Your thick frock will be much better for romping about in, May."

"But, mamma, I don't want——"

"Nonsense, May. I won't have any more talking about it. Go to bed at once: do you hear?"

May walks upstairs with a general sense of oppression and ill-usage hanging over her. She does not feel in the least inclined to go to bed. Who could feel sleepy on such a glorious summer's evening as this!

Stopping at the open staircase window, she perches herself on the wide, old-fashioned sill, and looks out at the green lawn and gay flower-beds, at the wooded hill that borders the garden,—beyond, again, at the distant mountains towering up and forming a background to the picture. How beautiful those mountains are, with the evening lights and shadows resting on them! Some grey, bleak and stern, their faces set to meet the coming night; others in softer mood, with the dying sunlight lingering yet upon them, and painting the rugged crags in a hundred varying shades of rose and purple. Just a common Welsh scene; and yet a scene of no common beauty.

You will have guessed already, dear reader, that the home of our little heroine is in Wales.

"Oh!" then perhaps you will say, "so May is a little Welsh girl, and not an English one?"

Well, I assure you she is as genuine a little Saxon as you are. But as for being English, why, you know if she were really a little Welsh girl she would stand a much better chance of being a regular genuine Briton than you do,—that is to say, she would very probably, in that case, be a descendant of some of those delightful old fellows whom Julius Cæsar found here, all dressed in blue paint,—whereas you, if you chance to have fair hair and blue eyes (as I daresay you have), are probably no more a Briton than was Julius Cæsar himself, and must quite give up the idea of having had a blue-painted great-great-grandpapa, since your ancestors were probably some of those cruel Saxons who drove the poor dear Britons into Wales and all sorts of out-of-the-way places, just to make room for themselves and their friends.

However, it is very plain that our May cannot be a little Welsh girl, since her name is neither Jones, Roberts, nor Owen.

"Only she lives in Wales," you say.

That is true. But if one lived in a pigstye, must one necessarily be a pig?"

"Well, probably," you reply; "or one would be likely to grow into one."

Which is quite true again, but does not in the least apply to Wales, or anything in it, since Welsh people and Welsh homes are the very reverse of pigs or pigstyes. Therefore, by all the rules of logic, it is, you will agree, clearly demonstrated that the fact of living in Wales does not turn people into Welshmen or Welshwomen, unless they stayed a very, very long time there indeed; and then of course we should not like to say what might happen.

As it is, however, our May has only been living in the land of slates and blackberries for six months, Mr. Berkeley having come to reside at Mwyngil partly for the benefit of his wife's health, and partly on account of the fishing and shooting which the neighbourhood afforded. So May gazes out at the purple mountains, and the white clouds stealing

down their sides, with a yet untired interest. Had she known them all her life, she would probably care little for them, or fail to appreciate their beauties, until they were to her as things of the past.

But this is a long digression, and we must hasten back to rejoin our little heroine at her post of observation.

"How lovely it all is!" says May, peering out of the window. "What a glorious evening, too! How I should like just to be going out for a walk!" (May has rather a habit of talking to herself.) "What nonsense it is going to bed while it is as light as this!" she goes on. "As for sleeping, I'm sure I shan't do that; and it is so horrid lying awake. However——"

With a sigh she tears herself away from the window and goes upstairs.

It is only quite lately that May has been promoted to the honour and glory of putting herself to bed. It is a privilege that she values highly, and it is understood to be a point of honour with her, that there shall be no unreasonable delay in

The growl again!

In an agony of terror, May drops half her finery and flies to the door; the long skirts of her dress entangle her, and before she can reach it, she rolls helplessly over on the floor, fiercely pursued by Prince, Aunt Flo's pet dog, who has been startled out of his nap and his peace of mind, by May's comical "get up."

"Oh, Prince, is it you? How could you!" She means to laugh, but somehow the laugh dies away in a sort of unfinished cadence, and putting her arms round Prince's neck she bursts into tears. Prince is one of the kindest and best hearted dogs in the world, and he says and does all he possibly can to convince May that he had not the least intention of frightening her—that, in fact, he was rather frightened himself, she looked so very queer.

He makes all sorts of little dumb apologies: going over on his back, beating away in the air with his four paws, and then jumping up and licking May's face and hands in the most vehement way—never once attempting to excuse himself by

saying, as he naturally might have done, "Well, if *I* didn't know *you*, *you* didn't know *me*, and that's quits," but taking the entire blame upon himself, and only anxious for a complete assurance of pardon. The two indulge in a pretty little bit of affection for a few moments.

Then May jumps up,—or perhaps I should say, makes a series of jumps-up, so thoroughly is she wound about and wrapped up in Aunt Flo's ample skirts; at length, however, she manages to extricate herself. She just gives a glance round the room, to see that things in general look much as she found them, and then at last departs to her own quarters, taking Prince with her for company.

It is a very grand and grown-up thing, of course, to put oneself to bed; but when the summer daylight is fading and the shadows begin to creep into the corners, a little company is not objectionable, particularly such a companion as Prince, who never contradicts or objects to anything that is said to him, and is altogether—except on rare occasions—a dog of great discrimination and good sense.

As May speeds along she hears the hall clock below, striking nine, with a deep thrilling *boom* in its voice that she never noticed in the daytime. The corridor is so dim and shadowy now, that May is not sorry to gain her own little room, where the blind is still up, and there are no corners for the shadows to play freaks in.

"I had no idea it was so late, really: had you, Prince?" she says, as she closes her door softly.

Prince's answer is not recorded, but we may be sure that he was equally surprised and shocked at the lateness of the hour. May knows that she must make the greatest possible haste to be in bed before Jane, her mamma's maid, comes to look in upon her, as she goes down to supper.

Still, May does not, in all her haste, forget to kneel down by the side of her little white-curtained bed and say her simple prayers earnestly and reverently. Never since she can remember has May lain down to rest without first asking for God's blessing, forgiveness, and guidance. And—though May is a little girl who does a great many—

wrong and foolish things, we may be quite sure that this habit of daily communion with God is the greatest possible blessing and safeguard to her, and will keep her from many a stumble and fall along the stony roads of life.

When May rises from her knees she goes to the window, and takes a last peep out. The daylight is fading fast now, and the moon is rising high over the distant woods. Here and there the stars are twinkling—trying with all their might to make themselves seen ; but between the lingering daylight and the rising moonshine, having rather a bad time of it.

“How pretty it is !” May says to herself. “When I have the arrangement of things in general—my fairy wand, I mean—I shall make people sit up all through these lovely summer nights, and go to sleep in the daytime—like the fairies do, in fact. Ah ! talking of fairies,” May goes on, “it will be quite a night for them. The dear little things : how I should like to catch sight of some of them ! But I don’t believe they come out so early as this ; do you, Prince ?”

Prince intimates that that is quite his own view of the question, and yawns very decidedly, as though to impress upon his young companion his firm idea that it is time to go to bed.

"Well, so it is; though I am not a bit sleepy," May says, as she lays her head on the pillow.

She is not a moment too soon, for directly after, in comes Jane very stealthily with a candle, which she shades carefully with her hand, as she proceeds to draw down the blind in funny little jerks, which make double as much noise as though she did it naturally.

"Why, you stupid old Jane—don't you see that I'm wide awake?" May says to herself; but she does not speak out. It is such fun to see Jane go sliding and slipping about in that ridiculous fashion; but when she has left the room, and shut the door *very* noiselessly, May bursts out laughing.

"And now I really must go to sleep at once, or I shall be awake when mamma comes up to bed, and that will vex her, I know," May says, and thereupon sets to work very hard to go to sleep. She does not feel at all sleepy; but no matter.

"I'm sure there's a particular way people have of going to sleep," she says. "I wish I knew quite how to do it. I've heard papa do it ever so many times; I think it's two little snorts and a long breath, and then two more little snorts, and so on."

May tries that for some time, but finds it rather exhausting.

"Perhaps it is one snort to begin with," she thinks, "and then the two snorts after a while, when you get more sleepy."

May tries that too; but the effect does not seem to be much better.

"What can I do?" sighs poor May; "I do so want to go to sleep! Oh! I think I'll say my multiplication table. I'm sure that ought to send me off, if anything will."

So she begins very steadily, twice, and three-times, and four-times, and five-times; but six-times is always very troublesome.

"Six-times five is—six-times fi—— Where was I? Oh! six-times f——"

Just at this moment May fancies she hears her

mamma coming. Her eyes are shut, but she thinks, "I *will* open them, because it isn't honest to pretend to be asleep when you are not. Yes, I will open them, and say—six-times f—— What was it I was going to say? Oh! six-times f——" Her mamma is here now, May is quite sure; standing by her. Only her eyes are so hard to open.

"But I *will* do it," May thinks, "because I am *not* asleep. And it is such nonsense; and I must tell her about—yes, about—— Six times f——"

With a violent effort May rouses herself; and this is the scene which presents itself to her astonished gaze.

CHAPTER III.

MIDSUMMER EVE.

SUMMER night in the woods !

Long shadowy glades of softest green, stretching away and away, in this direction and that. Each leaf and blade of grass shimmering in silver light. Above, the great moon sailing slowly along the blue vault of heaven, and over all the earth a deep hush and stillness !

This is the scene upon which May, as her eyes unclosed, gazes spell-bound !

And, strangest of all, there is she, May herself, lying asleep beneath a tree. May knows and feels that it is she herself, and yet in the most curious way she is able to see herself lying there.

"It's the queerest thing I ever knew," May says to herself softly ; " I can't understand it. Besides, it

doesn't look like me, somehow. And yet I'm sure it is me—I mean, that I'm it. Dear me! how confusing it is! Oh yes, it's me, and no mistake!"

Just at this moment a faint little voice sounds close to her ear; or rather, it seems to her the far-off echo of some voice a dozen miles or so away.

"Pray, do you call that good English?" asks the voice.

May starts up, and peers about in the direction from which the voice seems to come—far away, right in front of her. But not a creature can she see: nothing but the soft stretch of the greensward, and the shadows lying still in the moonlight.

"I really thought I heard Miss Williams speaking," May says. "But I suppose she is too far off for me to see. It was just one of her pet questions. English, indeed!" May goes on, rather indignantly: "I should like to know how anybody can expect anybody else to think about grammar, or English, or that sort of thing, when they don't know, to begin with, which person they are themselves. It is perfectly ridiculous!"

"Give yourself a pinch," says the faint far-off echo.

of a voice again. May, who is beginning now to feel that it is really she, herself, who is lying asleep under the forest tree, does as the voice bids her, from the mere force of habit. After that she feels a little more comfortable and like herself.

"What is the use of thinking about it?" she remarks philosophically, after a little while. "I believe it is one of those things that no one can understand—like rule of three, in fact. I really think I must be in fairyland."

"Of course you are," says the voice again; and May fancies this time that it is a tiny bit nearer to her—perhaps a mile or two. She rouses herself to look.

"Wherever are you?" she says, gazing with all her eyes, first in one direction, then in another. At last, by the merest good chance, she catches sight of the tips of her own toes. There, seated astride in the most free-and-easy fashion, is the funniest, tiniest, most ridiculous little manikin of a fairy.

May raises her foot just a little, so that she can see better.

"Oh! you *have* found me out at last, have you?" he says, in rather a hurt tone.

"Really I beg your pardon," says May; "I wouldn't have overlooked you for the world if I had known; but how could I expect to see you sitting there, you know?"

"No," says the manikin, chuckling very softly to himself. So softly, that it sounds to May like the echo of a laugh which somebody had laughed a week ago. "No; but I fancy you will presently see a good many things that you never expected to see—that is, if you stay here long enough."

"Dear me!" says May; "where am I, then? I should be so much obliged if you would tell me; for the truth is, I feel rather uncertain about—about several things. Indeed, I'm not quite clear, you see, whether it is me who——"

"Now, really!" interrupts the fairy, in a tone of reproach.

"Oh yes! I beg your pardon. Whether it is myself, I mean," interrupts May in her turn. "I assure you I did not mean to annoy you again," she

says apologetically. For she thinks it is best to be as polite as she can to this strange little creature.

He is now standing in the most comical attitude, perched on one leg, on the extreme tip of May's right foot.

"I shall be delighted to give you any information, I'm sure," says the manikin, making a most profound bow, with one foot in the air and his hands clasped on his heart. "You are indeed in fairy-land,—on the very spot where the great fairy gathering of the year is about to be held."

As he speaks, he draws himself up with such dignity that he overbalances himself and falls heels over head on to the grass.

"I wish he wouldn't do that," thinks May, giving a start. Not being accustomed as yet to fairy ways and manners, she fears that he has hurt himself. The exercise does not, however, appear to disagree with him. He picks himself up again in a second, and continues, without a pause,—

"The queen, with all her court, will shortly arrive ;

and I shall have great pleasure in taking you under my protection."

May feels very much inclined to laugh; but with a great effort restrains herself, not wishing to hurt the manikin's feelings.

"Why, I could squeeze you up between my finger and thumb, you little bit of absurdity!" she *thinks*, but fortunately does not say.

It does not do, either in this world or in fairyland, to say everything that comes into one's head.

"And," continues May's small champion, "as it is quite against the rules for mortals to be present at these solemn festivities, I would advise you, when the court assembles, to keep perfectly quiet. Pretend to be asleep, and whatever you do, don't interrupt the proceedings, or the consequences might be—terrible!"

"Oh! thank you: I'll be sure and remember," May says. For she is rather frightened by that threat of consequences. "Who is to know what fairy consequences might be?" she thinks. "I might be turned into something unpleasant—a toad or a frog—

perhaps, or a lizard! I really had better take care what I am about."

"You are such a little thing that I daresay they will not see you," observes the manikin consolingly.

May feels dreadfully disposed to laugh again, but presses her lips tightly together, to prevent herself from doing so.

"Hush! hush!" says the fairy solemnly.

"Why, I never spoke a word!" May answers. She really could not help saying so much.

"Well, don't do it again, then," returns the manikin; "for here they come, and I must be off to see that those glowworms' lamps are all properly lighted. But I'll take care of you; don't you be afraid. Goodbye."

With that he flings himself away in a series of somersaults, till he is quite out of sight.

For awhile all is still.

A dark cloud is wafted across the face of the moon, and the lights and shadows blend into one dusky whole.

But May, straining her eyes into the far distance, presently perceives two rows of glimmering lights,

"I don't know why I shouldn't be a bank as well as anything else."

By this time, however, the grasshoppers, quite exhausted with all their exertions, have left off chirruping—for which May is inclined to be thankful, as she cannot help thinking that the tune which they have been playing was a little monotonous.

The fairies, too, have calmed down. The queen—at least, as she is clothed altogether in diamonds May thinks she must be the queen—gives a signal, and the dance ceases. The queen reclines gracefully upon the frond of a lady-fern which grows close by the tree under which May is lying.

The fairies dispose themselves in various attitudes of repose around her. Some lounge on the petals of a cowslip, some creep into the bells of the fox-gloves, some stretch at length, on diamond-studded blades of long grass, while some swing lazily to and fro on the overhanging leaves of the big tree.

"After play comes work," observes the fairy queen sententiously.

May fancies that she has heard that somehow

differently put ; but she cannot stop to think about it now. There is so much that she wants to observe going on around her.

She can't quite make out what the fairies are all about ; but she notices that first one jumps up and talks a great deal, and then another fairy jumps up and contradicts everything that the first fairy has said.

"I do believe it must be a Parliament," she observes softly ; "because I remember papa telling me yesterday, how in Parliament all the members get up and talk away at one another just like that. Yes, I'm sure it is. How very interesting !"

But just at this moment, as she is straining her ears to the very uttermost, to hear what is being said, a strange unaccountable drowsiness comes over her. In vain she struggles against it. The fairy voices sound more and more distant and far away. In vain she tries to catch the sense of what the little people are saying. She has been keeping still so long, that she cannot help letting her eyelids close.

Only, every now and then she is roused by a sudden movement on the part of all the fairies at once.

Without any particular cause, as it seems to her, they all spring up, and begin wildly dancing and careering about for several minutes, until the queen calls them to order again, with her usual formula—
“After play comes work.”

Then they all settle down again for about three minutes more; to jump up again at the end of that time, and go through the same series of antics.

“I never saw such creatures for getting up and jumping about,” May thinks. “I wonder whether it makes them much more inclined to be steady afterwards. I daresay it does. I wish Miss Williams would let me try it, at lessons. I think I’ll ask her. I believe it would do me good sometimes; I believe——” But at this moment May becomes extremely vague as to her belief about things in general.

It is an extraordinary fact that, even in fairyland, people must go to sleep sometimes.

CHAPTER IV.

IN FAIRYDOM.

HOW long May slept she could never accurately determine. But the sound of her own name, clearly and unmistakably pronounced, rouses her.

She starts up to answer, but fortunately remembers in time the warning words of her manikin counsellor.

"They are actually talking about me," she says to herself, holding her breath very hard indeed, so as not to lose a word.

"We would fain hear tidings of her," observes the queen.

Although she has now moved out of May's sight, May is quite sure that it is the queen who is speaking, because she knows that all kings and queens begin their speeches with "we would fain": at least, all the kings and queens of May's acquaintance do so.

"Really it is very kind of them to be so interested about me," May thinks. "I *must* hear what they are saying."

A pretty little fairy, jumping off a flower on which she has been see-sawing with a sister-fay, now advances to the queen's throne, and makes a profound courtesy.

"Aha! Princess Diamond-dew!" says her royal mistress. "You are returned, then, from this quest. Inform us of our favourite. Is she well and happy? Does she lack aught? Happy beyond the lot of other mortals should be the midsummer children of our love. Speak on."

All this the queen declaims with the greatest dignity of tone and manner, and when she concludes there is heard a faint echo of applause and cheering.

But the moment she has finished speaking, the queen, apparently tired of maintaining her elevated tone, trips lightly off the lady-fern where she has been sitting in state, and leads off a country-dance with Princess Diamond-dew, without giving the prin-

cess time to "speak on," or answer one question that has been put to her.

"Ah! I thought so," says May, rather offended. "I thought they couldn't keep quiet for five minutes together, however important the subject they were discussing might be."

For May, like the rest of us, is apt to think her own affairs of more importance than anybody else's.

After awhile, however, order is restored. As soon as the queen is inclined to rest, all the other fairies stop dancing, with the exception of a few quite young ones, who are very troublesome, and insist upon standing on their heads and taking flying leaps through the air, long after the others have settled down quietly.

"Those are the boy fairies," May remarks to herself; "I am quite sure of that. Don't I know how troublesome boys are, in our part of the world!"

The queen, however, soon reduces them to order with a wave of her fairy wand. And May sighs to be a fairy more than ever.

It was curious that May had not noticed these

wands before ; but now she observes that each fairy holds one in her hand, and as the moon is hidden behind a passing cloud, May sees that at the top of each wand is a twinkling spark of light. In the gloom, as the fairies gently wave them to and fro, these flicker, and dance, and sparkle among the trees, like thousands of miniature lamps at an illumination.

"How pretty!" May cries. But almost before the words are out of her mouth the moon reappears, and the fairy lamps hide their diminished heads again.

Princess Diamond-dew is addressing the assembly. But to May's great annoyance she cannot catch every word of the tiny fairy voice, though she is quite sure of the last sentence. It is—"Something radically wrong."

The queen, who has by this time quite discarded her royal dignity, and retired, so to speak, into private life, here breaks in,—

"Been eating radishes, did you say, princess? Then I am not surprised at anything. That accounts for all."

May blushes quite up to the roots of her hair ; for she does remember that she had radishes with her tea, that very evening. "But I never knew it was wrong before," she says very softly ; "I am sure mamma has often given me some herself ; so really——"

She stops in her soliloquy to hear what the princess is saying now. She is evidently trying to put the queen right upon some point, but May can only catch the words,—

"Her name, alas ! great queen,—her name !"

The queen jumps up at this moment to administer a pat to one of the irrepressible boy fairies, and seems half inclined to start off on a frolic on her own account.

To May's great relief, however, she alters her mind.

"I should like to know what is the matter with my name, *really*," May thinks, quite offended. "I have always been so glad that I wasn't called 'Sarah' or 'Jemima,' or something like that : I think May is very pretty."

However, the fairy judgment seems to be against

her ; for the queen, giving a start as if some sudden idea had struck her, calls out in quite a resonant voice (for a fairy),—

“ May!—May! May in midsummer! Why, of course! The child is a mistake from beginning to end. Quite out of season, in fact! We might as well attempt to play blackberry-croquet in March! That accounts for all.” With this the queen leans back upon the lady-fern with an air of great depression.

May listens in no very pleasant frame of mind.

“ I do think it is too bad for them to be all talking about me in this way, and I not able to say a word for myself. I really will get up and tell them that, to begin with, my name is Mary and not May, and that they have no right to call me ‘out of season and a mistake from beginning to end.’ I should like to know what my mamma and papa would say if they could only hear me being called these names. It is too bad to bring me to fairyland to treat me in this way. I—I——”

May has worked herself up into such a state of indignation and excitement, that at this point she

bursts into tears, and the big drops roll fast down her cheeks, one after the other.

A tiny voice sounds close to her ear; and May, turning her head, discovers her fairy manikin-friend seated cross-legged on her right shoulder, regarding her with the greatest interest. Her tears are falling upon him, and are evidently making him extremely damp and uncomfortable, though he is attempting to shelter himself a little by holding a fern leaf over his head.

"Oh! how well you do it, to be sure!" he remarks, admiringly. "Where did you learn it?"

"Learn what?" asks May, very much surprised.

"To cry so beautifully. Oh! don't stop," as May attempts to dry her eyes. "Pray go on, if you don't mind. I never was more interested in my life. Do you think you could teach me?"

May's tears by this time have completely turned to smiles. She tries very hard, however, to squeeze out one or two more, as the fairy seems so delighted; but she can't manage it, and is obliged to laugh instead.

"Why! do you mean to say you never cry, then?" she asks, much amused.

"No, unfortunately. You see, at our fairy schools they don't teach accomplishments well; in fact, there are very few among us who have learned *that*. I have often sat and told myself the most dismal stories for the hour together, but I have never been able to manage crying yet."

"How very funny!" remarks May. "With us, you know, it comes quite naturally."

"Dear me! what a comfort! What! like reading and writing, you mean?"

May does not quite follow him, but she gives a nod of her head—"which may mean anything, you know," she says to herself.

"Oh how happy you mortals must be, to cry whenever you like!" the manikin goes on.

"Do you think so? We always fancy that the fairies must be so happy, who——"

"Don't talk to me," breaks in the fairy, in a very rude way, as May thinks. "How can creatures be happy who have no more chance of relieving their

feelings than a dog? However miserable we may be we can't show it. Don't you see?"

"Ah! yes, I see," May goes on, wishing to say something civil. "But at any rate you can laugh when you are pleased—for I have heard you,—and a dog can't do that, can he?"

"Yes, of course he can. He can wag his tail, which is just as good—in fact, I think better." This rather snappishly.

"Are the fairies still going on talking about me, I wonder?" May says.

"Oh yes."

"Then, if you don't mind, I do wish you would be quiet just for a little while, and let me listen."

The manikin flings himself off her shoulder angrily.

"Of course, if you prefer their twaddle to an intellectual conversation with me," he says.

May, unwilling to affront him, calls out as loud as she dares, "Oh, pray don't think——" But as he is quite out of sight by this time, she does not finish her sentence.

"It was he who told me particularly not to talk,

too," she says to herself. "I'm sure the fairies ~~seem~~ very touchy and bad-tempered. But of course I ~~do~~ want to hear what they are saying. Anybody would I'm sure."

With that she strains her ears to listen to ~~what~~ is going on.

The queen is replying to something that Prince Diamond-dew has been saying, and is speaking ~~at~~ rather snappishly, May thinks; but at least she is more complimentary in her remarks than she was.

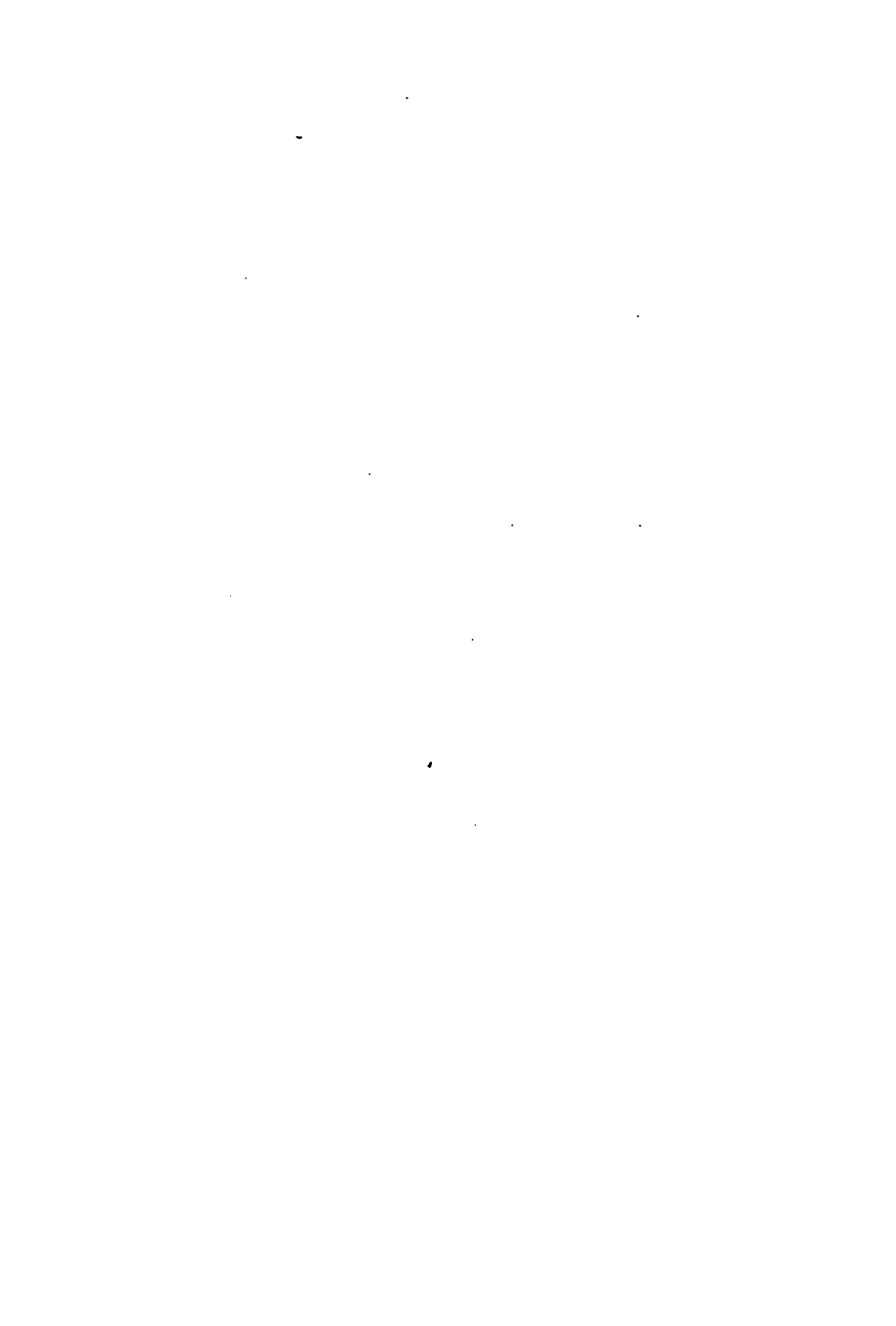
"What more can I do? What more do ~~you~~ want?" she is saying. "I have given the child ~~his~~ parents, a happy home, wealth, beauty, and intelligence: what more is necessary to complete ~~his~~ happiness?"

May feels rather more pleasantly inclined toward the fairy monarch than she did a few minutes ~~since~~. 'Umph! well! she really owes me some ~~reparation~~ for saying just now I was a mistake from ~~beginning~~ to end," says May, listening with all her ears for what shall come next.

"True, great queen!" (Princess Diamond-dew is



"Oh ! how well you do cry, to be sure," ren-a-ks the manik'n admiringly ; " where did you learn it ? "



speaking again), "True! But with all this, your majesty will well believe that our favourite's happiness is not complete, when I tell you that in many things, nay, I might say in almost everything, she is controlled and thwarted; in fact—your majesty will scarcely believe it—she is not allowed to have her *own way!*"

A murmur of indignant astonishment thrills through the fairy court.

"What! A fairy favourite—a midsummer child not allowed to have her own way!"

"Impossible!"

"Ridiculous!"

"Preposterous!"

"Absurd!"

Expressions such as these resound on every side.

"I never heard of such cruelty in my life," cries one very sprightly little manikin. "Not have her own way!—why, she might as well not have her own hair or teeth!"

"Ah!" observes a solemn old fairy, who is seated comfortably on a mushroom near the last speaker.

"You may hardly credit it, but I have heard that among mortals it is not unusual for them to borrow one another's——"

"One another's what?" asks a chorus of tiny voices.

"One another's hair, and teeth too."

"Oh! impossible! impossible!" is the cry from all sides, and there is a sound of laughter all over the wood, from every blade of grass and quivering leaf, like the tinkling of fifty thousand tiny, tiddy silver bells a mile and three-quarters away.

Then there is a general demand for the grasshoppers to *strike up*, and a new fairy frolic commences.

Off they go, the little people, whirling, gliding, sparkling in the silver moonlight, until May at last is glad to close her tired eyes, and shut out the bewildering scene. She is getting intolerably sleepy once more.

The queen's voice, calling her court to order, rouses her.

"After play comes work."

May's ears open wide, though her eyes will keep obstinately shut in spite of all her efforts to unclosethem.

"Her own way!" says the queen. For the best to be said of these fairy outbreaks is, that after they are over, business is resumed at exactly the point of interest.

"Her own way! So that is what you think would secure the happiness of our midsummer child,—eh, princess?"

"Exactly, your majesty."

"Ah! but I have heard said by fairies of undoubted experience—some of my wisest counsellors in fact—that, unlike ourselves, the happiness of mortals is not always perfected by the fulfilment of all their wishes."

The queen seems disturbed and doubtful.

"Your majesty means, that these foolish mortals do not always know what is really good for them. That I admit in many cases. But for our midsummer child—she upon whom your majesty has already bestowed so many precious gifts—for her,

we need fear no such unhappy results! Her intelligence is far beyond her years: her own way would, I am convinced, always be the right way."

"What a sensible fairy, to be sure!" May observes under her breath. "That is quite what I think."

"In short, let your majesty but be guided by my counsel, and give her the free power to have everything exactly as she wishes it, and I am sure, not only that she will be the happiest little girl out of fairydom, but also that no evil results will follow."

"A most sensible fairy indeed," thinks May.

The queen still seems doubtful. She speaks with unusual thoughtfulness and gravity.

"I tremble, princess, to place in this child's hands a power of which she may not know the strength and importance—an unlimited power."

"Limit it, then, great queen."

"What do you mean, princess?"

"Give her this power but for a time—say but for one day—and test her fitness by the uses she may put it to. To-morrow—no, to-day, this very day,—for see, the dawn is already breaking—is the child's

birthday. This one short summer day let her be happy: let her have her own way."

The queen still hesitates.

"What a stupid old thing!" May says to herself.

"Why doesn't she say 'yes' at once, and have done with it?"

The queen sighs. Then after a pause,—

"I have considered, princess, and though still troubled and doubtful of the result, I will consent to exert my regal power and grant your petition. For this one day at least, our midsummer child, whose happiness lies at our heart, shall have her own way!"

This is declaimed in a very dignified and impressive manner, and as the queen concludes there is a general cheering and clapping of fairy hands.

"Oh! the dear little fairy-queen! This is delightful! that will be something like a birthday. Oh! how charming!—and I'm sure I won't wish for anything that is wrong," May says.

She feels that she would like to get up a cheer, too,—a good loud sensible *hooraaah*, only she is so sleepy.

There is a stir, however, among the fairies.

"La séance est levée," says the queen, as she jumps from her lady-fern throne, and casts off her dignity at the same time.

"Only think of the fairies condescending to talk French," says May to herself, rather disgusted.

"One moment—one little moment, great queen," cries Princess Diamond-dew. "The day is breaking fast, and I dare not lose an instant of precious time."

"Time was made for boobies," the queen observes rather crossly. "What's the matter now?"

"It is only a brother, please your majesty."

Princess Diamond-dew is quite cowed by the queen's manner, and evidently at this point wishes she had learned crying when she was at school.

"Brother! Ridiculous! whose brother?" The queen is in a great hurry for a scamper before the daylight really shall come, and put the fairies to flight, and is evidently very impatient of more petitioning.

"Our favourite, May's."

"Oh, May's! What's the matter with him? He is not a midsummer child. Why do you worry and tease me about *him*, I should like to know?"

"It is he who worries and teases May. That is what I wished to say to your——"

But the queen will not be detained a moment longer. The daylight is growing broader and broader. The birds are stirring, and warbling, to greet the rising sun. A rosy flush is chasing away the emerald and silver light.

The queen stamps her foot.

"Enough, enough!" she cries; "let him be smothered—and at once."

But this May really cannot endure. It is too awful.

She struggles with a violent effort to rise to her feet, but something holds her down. Why will not her eyes unclosed? Why does a dead weight lie on her chest—seem to stop her from speaking or crying out? What though he is a tease—what though—— Oh! her own dear brother! "Cecil! Cecil!" she cries.

There is a moment of extreme pain, of effort amounting to agony; and then, with a scream, she rises, opens her eyes, and finds herself—clasped in her mother's arms.

CHAPTER V.

A BIRTHDAY MORNING.

“WHY, my dear May, what is the matter?
You have been dreaming, darling.”

Mrs. Berkeley smooths her little girl's tumbled hair and presses her close in her loving arms. May hides her face on her mother's bosom, and shudders.

“Oh! mamma, they were going to smother him: only think! And I couldn't stop them.”

“Who are *they*? and who was to be treated so?”

“The fairies. They were going to smother Cecil, and——”

At this point May raises her head, and looking into her mother's face, meets her eyes full of wondering amusement. A smile, too, is playing about her mouth.

“Oh, mamma, was it only a dream?”

"Why, of course, my little girl; you are scarcely awake yet."

"And it will not all come true, then?"

"No fear of that, especially since you have told me all about it. Dreams that are told never come true, you know," says Mrs. Berkeley.

"Don't they really?" returns May, thoughtfully, taking her mamma's words as meant quite seriously. Then, after a moment's pause,—

"And don't you think that I have been to fairyland at all, then, mamma?"

Mrs. Berkeley smiles. "Well, darling, I should hardly like to say; but wherever you *have* been, I am sure that the moment you are awake enough to open those sleepy little eyes of yours, you will confess that you are in fairyland now."

So May raises her head from her mamma's shoulder and looks round her. Her eyes open as wide as they will possibly go, and the sleepiness vanishes in a moment. She had quite forgotten for the time that it was her birthday morning, but now the excitement and joy of it flash upon her. All

across the foot of her little bed is a strip of red calico, with cardboard letters pasted, not very regularly, upon it: "Many happy returns of the day."

It is evidently Cecil's handiwork, and May remembers with a little twinge of remorse that she was very cross with him, for shutting himself in the schoolroom and locking the door yesterday morning. Was he really busied in doing something to please and gratify her? However, this is only a passing thought; other matters claim her more immediate attention.

"Oh! mamma dear, of course it is my birthday. But what can all these be?" As she speaks, May gazes, with wide-opened eyes and clasped hands, at a collection—a perfect wall and rampart of paper parcels, of all shapes and sizes, which are ranged at the foot of her bed. "They can never all be presents for me, can they?"

Mrs. Berkeley looks at them one after another with a scrutinizing air.

"I really think they look very like it,—suppose you untie one or two, and see? It certainly seems

as if some beneficent fairy had been at work here. Don't you think so?"

"Mamma, *you* are my good fairy, I am sure." And May springs into her mother's arms once more, before attempting to examine her treasures.

Mrs. Berkeley kisses her little girl fondly.

"God bless you, my darling, and give you many years of health and happiness!" she says in her soft low voice.

"And now, dear mamma, whichever shall I open first? Just see! Here is a long parcel in brown paper, and a square parcel in blue paper, and a flat parcel in white paper (that looks like a book, I think), and—— Oh! dear me, I really am quite bewildered. Well, I think I will open this large one in brown paper the first, because I fancy—indeed I am almost sure—that it is a very big doll, as big as a real baby, and you know, of all things in the world, that is what I should like best."

Mrs. Berkeley smiles and nods, with a tolerable notion that the parcel in question may contain something of the kind.

May draws it to her, talking all the while.

"Why, mamma, it is as much as I can do to lift it! I believe, really I *do* believe it is a baby doll. Don't you think so? But what is this written outside? 'For my dear May, from her loving mother.' Oh! mamma, then you *know* what it is."

May's excited fingers can scarcely untie the string, but in another second that obstacle is surmounted, and the baby doll is displayed in all her glory,—embroidered robe, waxen arms, blue eyes, lace-bordered cap! May does not know what to admire most, as she nestles her close in her arms. May has all the instincts of a true woman in her, and loves her dolls now, as she means to love her little live dolls by-and-by.

Mamma comes in for a good many more kisses, too, we may be sure, as each new glory of tucked petticoat, silk-bound flannel, and knitted socks—all the work of mamma's own hands—is discovered and commented on.

"Well, May, and are you not going to open any of your other parcels?" at last mamma asks.

“Oh, yes, dear mamma ; only I really don’t know **which** to take first. Let me see. Here is this little **packet** in blue paper—what can that be? Let me **look** at the direction. ‘Midsummer May, from the fairy godmother.’ Why, that’s papa’s writing, I’m sure. Isn’t it? Only think of his calling himself a fairy godmother !”

It is tied up very tightly. “How I wish I could get the string off!” May sighs ; and at the same moment it breaks and comes into her hand. •

But there is another paper—silver paper this time. May’s excitement increases.

“Mamma, will you hold dolly? I am so afraid of crumpling her.”

Mamma dutifully takes the baby. May feels her little packet.

“It feels like a box. What can it be, mamma?” Then, unwrapping it,—“It *is* something in a little white box, and then all wrapped up in pink silver paper. Oh ! I really believe——”

“What would you like it to be, May?” asks mamma, covering the half-disclosed treasure with her hand.

"I do wish it might be a little gold cross for my neck, like Aunt Flo's. Do you really think it can be?"

But before the words are spoken, there it is, the very identical thing.

"It is exactly—oh, exactly what I wished for so much," May cries: "the dearest, prettiest, loveliest! But how could papa have guessed what I wanted, do you think, mamma?"

"Because he is a magician or a fairy godmother, or something of that kind, no doubt. But now make haste and open your other presents; for it is quite time you began to think about getting up, and coming down to breakfast."

One after another the parcels are opened. One—the square one in brown paper, and directed to Miss Berkeley, Mwyngil, Wales—is a desk, a present from Aunt Flo, and May cannot really make haste over that. Its arrangements are so perfect and so complicated that it takes a long time to come to the end of them. It is of green leather, with a beautiful lock and two keys.

"Two keys, mamma. How nice that is!" May observes; "because I will always keep *one* inside the desk, and then if I lose the other I shall always know where the one is."

"A most satisfactory arrangement, particularly if the desk is locked," returns mamma.

But May is too engrossed to follow the argument. When the desk is opened there are found a blotting-book and quite a pile of note-paper and envelopes, and an inkstand, so made that it can never by any possibility upset itself, nor be upset, unless under great provocation, and a delightful leather pocket for——

"Whatever can it be for, mamma dear? Isn't it charming?" May asks. And a pen, and pencil, and knife—a two-bladed knife—and a pair of scissors.

"What are the scissors for, do you think, mamma?" Then, without waiting for an answer, "Oh, to cut out the words that are mis-spelt—I see."

And most charming and delightful of all, and only discovered at the last moment, with a little help from mamma, a *secret drawer*, which May values more

than anything else, because she cannot in the least imagine what use she can put it to.

Then the book is opened—a present from grand-mamma,—and turns out to be that most delightful of all fairy tales, “The Waterbabies,” which, if you have not read, my dear reader, I advise you to read forthwith, and if you have read, to read it again. And this, too, was directed, and sealed, and covered half over, with postage stamps and postmarks, which made it trebly interesting and important.

Then, done up in at least half a dozen wrappers and strings (just for the sake of teasing, of course), is Cecil’s present, a dear little box of colours, with three real camel’s-hair brushes. After all, Cecil *is* kind, because he knew that May had long set her heart upon just such a box.

And lastly,—“Why, I do think this is another book, mamma, isn’t it?”

“I really don’t know, May. It came for you last evening, with Miss Williams’ love.”

It is in brown paper, and then in blue. May dips into the middle of it. It is a blank book with blue lines.

"Why, mamma, it is a copy-book," rather in a tone of dismay.

But, unfolding the blue wrapper, there are found printed on the outside, in gold letters, the word "Diary," and May's own initials, *M. B.*

May's face brightens.

"A *diary*! Oh! I see. That is nice. Then I shall be able to write down everything that happens, shan't I, mamma?"

"Yes, dear, indeed you will. You will find your new desk come in most usefully, I think."

"Yes, mamma. And if you were me, would you write the diary *every* day a little bit, or would you write in it every now and then, when anything *very* remarkable happens?"

"Really, my dear, I hardly know. But perhaps if you were to begin writing it every day, after a little while——"

"Oh! mamma, I know what you are going to say—that I should not keep on doing it."

"Well! there are a few things of which you have grown tired, are there not?"

"Oh, that horrid footstool, mamma! But I don't mean to be a baby any more; I will set to work directly after breakfast, and finish that."

"Yes, the footstool, and two or three other little things besides—eh, May? But you need not set to work at them to-day, my child. On your birthday you must do exactly as you like, you know."

May looks at her mother dreamily.

Did not somebody say that before? and when? She cannot at the moment recollect. The events of the past night have as yet scarcely returned to her memory.

"But now, May, get up at once, and dress, there's a good child, or you will not be ready for breakfast,—and it will never do to begin the year by being late."

As she speaks, mamma lays dolly very carefully down on two chairs, which make a beautiful little cot for it, and departs to finish her own half-completed toilette.

May means to get up instantly, but our best resolutions are not always carried out. She really cannot

help having a second look at her treasures, before taking the decisive leap, and even when that is made, the interruptions to her dressing operations are many and various.

Jane comes in to assist, and the whole array has to be spread out, and subjected to her approval. In spite of protests feebly uttered,—“You’d better let me do your hair now, miss,” “Indeed and you’ll be late,” and so on, she allows herself to be beguiled by the charms of one thing after another, until her admiration reaches its highest point when the desk, with the two keys and the secret drawer, is exhibited.

She declares it to be the most beautiful thing, however, that she did ever see.

So it is not to be wondered at, that the breakfast bell rings before May is anything like ready.

Mrs. Berkeley puts her head into the room on her way downstairs.

“Not dressed yet, May !”

“No, mamma dear,” from May ; and “Indeed then, ma’am,” deprecatingly from Jane.

"Ah, well, birthdays don't come every day, and little girls must be allowed to do as they like, I suppose; but don't be longer than you can help, my dear," says Mrs. Berkeley.

May is rather relieved; for punctuality is a point on which Mrs. Berkeley is apt to insist.

May knits her brow a moment. Jane is brushing her hair, and gives it a twist in the wrong direction just then.

Either that objectionable movement on the part of Jane, or the knitting of her brows, or something she cannot tell what, brings back to her mind what she was striving to recall.

"Ah! that's it,—now I know; of course it was the fairy queen that said so," she remarks.

Jane stops in her task. "And it was the fairy *said what*, Miss May?" she asks.

May is just going to tell her all about it (for Jane is a great confidant of hers), when a new train of ideas occurs to her. "Suppose," she argues, "it should after all have been only a dream—which I really don't think—then I had better not tell it, because mamma

said just now, that told dreams never came true, and I should—yes, I should like it to come true ! ”

It takes a so much shorter time to think things than to say them, that all this flashes through May's mind in half a second, and with scarcely a pause she answers Jane's question, “ What did the fairy say ? ”

“ Oh ! nothing—nothing of any consequence.”

Jane murmurs a sort of apology, and feels snubbed ; the result of which is an increased vigour in the hair-brushing.

And May sits quite silent, thinking over the events of the past night. They have all come back to her now with wonderful distinctness. By simply shutting her eyes the whole scene returns : the moonlight, the forest glade, the grotesque fairy figures, the comical dignity of the tiny monarch, the patronizing air of the friendly manikin,—all are there. Jane tells her that her hair is “ done,” but she does not hear, for she is once more listening entranced to the fairy edict which proclaims that for this day at least her wishes shall be all fulfilled !

"And really it does seem to be all coming true," she says to herself, as with her cross on her neck and dolly cuddled close in her arms, she makes her way downstairs. Jane follows her, heavily laden too.

Jane cannot quite make her little mistress out this morning, and remarks to one of her fellow-servants shortly after, that "indeed the child does not seem herself at all to-day, however."

CHAPTER VI.

WISH AND HAVE.

MAY is greeted in the dining-room, where all the family is seated at breakfast, with a burst of congratulations, and some raillery on her late appearance from papa and Cecil.

At another time May would probably have resented this, from the last-named person at any rate; but this morning she is so completely impressed with a sense of her own importance, that her amiability is beyond the reach of all disturbance. She is possessed with the very spirit of good-humour, or self-satisfaction—for the two are in truth very much the same thing—and even Cecil's shafts fall harmless.

She has, as heroine of the day, to make a little royal progress of thanking, and kissing, and good

wish receiving, round the table. But at last all is done, and May, taking her chair by Cecil, descends into every-day life, and begins eating her breakfast.

She, however, still asserts the privilege of the day by keeping dolly on her lap during the meal.

"My dear, you had better put it down," mamma says.

But May's pleading face, and papa's indulgent "Oh! let her do as she likes on her birthday, please, mamma," are too much for mamma's firmness.

May is triumphant, a little to her own surprise.

May has seen Mrs. Owen, the coachman's wife, many times, taking a meal very comfortably, while her baby rests on her lap, and she is desirous of proving herself as clever a little nurse and mother as Mrs. Owen.

But whether practice has made perfect in Mrs. Owen's case, or whether Cecil did really shake the coffee unnecessarily, when he handed May her cup, it is hard to say. May finds out, however, that there are anxieties connected with the nursing of babies and the eating of breakfasts at the same moment.

Certainly it was not the baby's fault, for she was as quiet and good as any baby could possibly be. We can only, I imagine, put it down to the score of May's awkwardness.

As she raises her cup to her lips for the very first time, a great *splotch* of coffee falls from the bottom of the cup on to the baby's beautiful clean embroidered robe, and leaves there an ugly yellow stain.

May is in despair.

"Oh! mamma—only see!" she cries.

"Well, my dear, you would have your own way, you know."

"Ah! I wish I hadn't now," cries poor May.

But the fairies, anxious as they may be to oblige her, can't help her there, you see. That is the worst of it. They may give us our own way sometimes, to be sure; but what is to be done when we begin to wish that we hadn't wished to have things just as we wanted? It must, of course, be as perplexing to the poor kind fairies as is the statement of the case to you, my dear, kind reader—quite a puzzle, in fact; and all the wishing in the world won't take

coffee-stains out of muslin robes, unfortunately, nor restore the freshness and purity that is once lost. The robe may be washed and starched and "done up," but it will never be quite like new any more, you know—never quite the same. So remember that, my dear child, and don't spill the coffee, if you can help it.

Dolly is laid at length upon the sofa, and May returns to her breakfast in a somewhat depressed and thoughtful mood.

She is roused by Cecil, who addresses her, not very elegantly, but a good deal to the point.

He is helping himself to radishes from a plate opposite him.

"Have some?" he says, holding two or three over May's plate.

"Oh! no, no, *please* not," is May's quick answer; and then she adds half aloud, quite unconsciously, "That accounts for all."

Cecil bursts out laughing. "That does *what*? How queer you are to-day, May! What do you mean?"

Every one's attention is aroused ; the colour mounts up to May's face, Mrs. Berkeley and Aunt Flo look inquiringly, and Mr. Berkeley asks,—

“What's the matter, fairy? Is Cecil teasing you? I won't have it, sir: do you hear? May is not to be laughed at, or contradicted to-day, by any one.”

“I wasn't teasing her, indeed, papa; but if you had seen how comically May looked at the radishes you couldn't have helped laughing yourself.”

“I wish you could find something else to amuse you,” May says, rather grandly. The more she thinks of it, the more she feels determined not to say anything about her fairy adventures. That one sentence was quite a slip. “If it really was all true,” she argues, “perhaps the fairies would not like my telling; and if not—if it was only a dream, I mean—why, I won't spoil the chance of its coming true, at any rate.”

Her wish as to her brother is scarcely expressed before it is fulfilled. Something else is found to amuse him, and to engross not only his attention but the attention of all the party. This is the arrival of

the post. Not the postman, for *he*, in this case, was a woman. An old Welsh woman, in a high felt hat worn on the top of her frilled cap, is seen slowly making her way up the garden.

"Take the letters in through the window, Cecil," says his father.

Cecil jumps up.

"There's only one, I do believe. Who's it for, Mary?" he asks of the old woman.

"How I wish it may be for me!" exclaims May.

"Greedy child!" laughs her papa; "you want everything this morning, do you?"

"I trust it may be to tell us how dear grand-mamma is," observes Mrs. Berkeley, anxiously; and May, looking at her mother's face, again wishes that she had not wished.

She is beginning to have a sort of conviction that what she *has* wished really will come to pass. It is so in this case.

Cecil takes the letter from the hand of old Mary, who is trying to puzzle out the name of the person to whom it is addressed.

"It is for one of the ladies, however," she observes, as she gives it up.

"It is for you, May: you really seem to do nothing but wish and have to-day." And Cecil throws down the letter carelessly into May's lap—too carelessly, May is inclined to think, for such an important document.

She turns it over and over and examines it on all sides before opening it, as she has seen folks older and wiser than herself do.

"Who can it be from, I wonder?" she says, feeling very important indeed.

"Open it, you goose, and see," returns Cecil.

May does so, and her face, which had before been radiant with suppressed delight and excitement, clouds suddenly over.

"Oh mamma, how dreadfully tiresome and provoking! It is from Alice Wynne, and she says"—reading from the letter—"Freddy was very ill yesterday, and the doctor came, and said he thought he had caught the scarlet"—scarlet something—whatever is it? Oh, *tiny*"—(May's voice is the

reverse of sympathetic)—“‘and so’—only listen to this, mamma!—‘we shall not be able to come and spend the day with you to-morrow. I am dreadfully sorry, and so is——’” May throws the letter down. “Oh, papa, isn’t it dreadfully tiresome?”

“Very tiresome for Freddy, I should say.”

Freddy meets with more condolence from Mrs. Berkeley and Aunt Flo than May thinks his case at all warrants.

Cecil for once sides with May.

“That boy’s a muff: he’s always catching something or other. Don’t you remember, mamma, he caught measles last year just at the beginning of the holidays, and only got well in time to go back to school again?”

Mr. Berkeley laughs. “Well, that showed a great want of tact, I must say.”

Mrs. Berkeley and Aunt Flo say, “Don’t talk like that, Cecil,” and “Poor little fellow!” respectively.

May sits in gloomy silence, and wishes that the

letter had not been for her after all. Her party, to which she had been looking forward for so long, will turn out to be a failure, she fears.

Mr. Berkeley notices her downcast face.

"Come, never mind, May. Don't you know the good old proverb, 'What can't be cured must be endured'? And as we can't cure Freddy, we must manage to get on without him."

"Oh, it isn't Freddy particularly, papa, that I care about; but only think,—there are Alice and Lucy and Amy, too, who can't come. There will be nobody at all."

"Well, you're a polite young lady! I am coming, let me tell you; and do you call me nobody?"

May laughs.

"Oh yes, papa, you're somebody, of course; but you're not a *party*, you know."

"I thought you were going to tell me that I was too old a 'party,' May. However, let us count heads. We are five. Who else will there be? The Richards' are coming, are they not?"

Aunt Flo answers,—“Yes, Mrs. Richards said last

night that Edith and Nelly were looking forward to the day with great delight."

"That makes seven."

May gives a sort of groan.

"Oh, dear me! I don't think seven *can* be a party—not a real party. Do you, Aunt Flo?"

"I don't see why you should not call it a party if you like, May, or, at any rate, have a very delightful day."

May considers this rather a shabby and evasive reply,—from Aunt Flo, too, who really knows what parties are! But she is too depressed to retort.

"And now comes the question of where we shall go for this wonderful picnic," observes Mr. Berkeley; "I don't think we have quite settled that yet, have we?"

"It must not be too far, papa, for fear of the weather."

This is the prudential side of the question, from mamma, of course, who has had some experience of Welsh showers.

"I fancy we shall have it fine to-day, my dear ; but we had better be provided with mackintoshes and umbrellas, and then I don't think we shall hurt in the waggonette. Where would you like to go, May?" asks papa.

Cecil answers before May has had time to make a decision.

"Let us go to the Druid mountain, and spread lunch out on the stones !"

"I'm afraid that would be rather too much of a mount for mamma. Besides, it is May who must choose to-day."

"Oh, not the Druid mountain, papa. What can you want to go there for, Cecil?—up all that way, only to see a lot of ugly big stones standing up, and nothing to do."

"But, May, they are most interesting."

"My dear boy, May does not find them so. Her antiquarian bump is not developed yet : is it, May?"

May is rather doubtful of the meaning of the word, but she makes a guess at it.

"I do like old things, if you mean that, papa.

That is just what I was going to say. I should so like to go to a ruin that Jane was telling me about the other day,—a dear delightful old ruin of a house that was burnt down years and years ago, and nobody will build it up again, because it is haunted. Don't you think that would be a charming place for a picnic? Only think! a real haunted house!"

"Well, May, the idea does not strike me as a very lively one; but that is a matter of taste. For my own part I should prefer the Druids."

Here Cecil breaks in. "Oh, May, that is a stupid place to go to! Just like a girl's choice."

"But, Cecil, a ruin! only think! And you did like Caernarvon Castle last summer, and I did not go, and I have never seen a real good ruin."

"Caernarvon Castle,—oh! that's different, because of King Edward and the little Prince of Wales, and all that; besides, a castle is something worth looking at, of course. But as for this stupid place—you can see plenty of ruined houses on the mountains any day, just as good as this, I'll be bound."

"Oh! those huts without any roofs.—They are

not at all interesting; and besides, I never heard that they were haunted, and I don't see why you should call my haunted house a stupid place, as you haven't been there to see."

"I think May has you there, Cecil," observes Mr. Berkeley. Then turning to May, "Well, fairy, you are queen of the day, you know, so if your heart is set on haunted mansions, there will we go. Eh, mamma?"

"Yes, dear, anywhere you like," returns mamma, "so long as it is not *quite* on the top of a mountain."

So that little point is settled, and again May has her way.

"Those dear, kind fairies! they certainly are keeping their word," May thinks, as she moves away from the breakfast table. "It is worth while being a midsummer child to have one's own way even for one day in the year."

May carries her collection of birthday presents into the schoolroom and spreads them out there. Dolly is laid comfortably upon two chairs, out of the way. Then May opens her desk. She is of

course very anxious to use it, and soil the pink freshness of her new blotting-book.

"You had better sit down and write to dear grandmamma at once, to thank her for her nice present," Mrs. Berkeley had said to May as they rose from breakfast.

May had assented readily.

She is, like a good many other little girls, rather fond of writing letters, so long as she is not obliged to be *very* particular as to the spelling, etc.

Her mamma has this morning, too, forgotten to say anything about ruling the lines, and that has pleased May very much. Not that she can write half as well without lines, but she thinks that it looks *much* nicer, and believes that her ideas flow more freely, and express themselves more elegantly, if she has not those ugly straight pencil-marks staring her in the face.

Nature is said to abhor straight lines; and if May had only known of the saying, she might have quoted it, and had some authority for her opinion. But unfortunately she didn't, and so, you see, she

was in her way quite as original as a good many other people are, till they find out that some one else has done or said just the same things before them.

May's ideas on this occasion do not, however, in spite of the absence of the objectionable lines, flow very fast. She gets as far as

"MY DEAREST GRANDMAMMA,—

"I thank you very much for the beautiful book you sent me." (And it must be confessed that Dame Nature would not have been at all offended by the regularity of even these few lines.)

There May pauses. It is rather difficult to know what to say next. She *was* going to write, "It is very pretty,"—meaning the book; but as she has not read it, how can she say so? Altogether there seems a very good excuse for bringing the new pink blotting-book into use.

And just then May's eye lights on the diary with the gilt *M. B.* on it.

There is no resisting *that*.

"Of course I must begin and write in it to-day," May observes, as she opens it; and poor grand-mamma's letter is put aside.

But what to begin with? That is a very important question.

Of course I presume, dear reader, that you will like to know; and though a diary is a very private affair indeed—and as a rule one must no more dream of reading other people's diaries than one would dream of reading their letters,—in this instance we may, I think, be admitted to the young lady's confidence.

Of course the date and the address must come first. May's hand trembles with eagerness as she puts the first stroke.

It really is a very serious and important affair, this first page of the journal. One is always so anxious to make it look neat and tidy, and sensible and natural, and all the rest, just as if it was not intended only for one's own private use and amusement.

But May is not at all sure that she will be able to resist showing her journal—certainly to her

mamma, and perhaps to Aunt Flo, and perhaps, if he is very good, to Cecil. So after she has written the first lines, "This book was given to me on my tenth birthday by my governess, Miss Williams, and I think it was very kind of her," she pauses.

She intended, when she began, to relate something about that wonderful visit to fairyland of the previous night; but she hesitates. She is not quite sure whether it would be well even to tell it to the book. It would be such a pity to run any risks about its not coming true, or to chance offending the fairies; and May knows by experience how very easily they are offended. So she gets her penknife and scratches out the words she had begun writing—"Last night."

It is something to bring the penknife into use, and though it does go *rather* through the paper, that is not to be wondered at, because the blade is really sharp, and it is a way knives have, besides.

Then she begins on another line, because there is a hole, and it's no use denying it. This time the entry is rather mysterious.

"It is Midsummer-day to-day, and I am a midsummer child, and so I think—that is, I am quite sure—and I will tell you *why*, dear journal, tomorrow morning—that this will be one of the very, very, very happiest days of all my life."

May reads this sentence over and over with some satisfaction, crossing the *t's* and dotting the *i's*, and putting a dash here and there by way of emphasis.

"If a person has everything just as they wish, they must be happy, mustn't they, dear journal?" May does not write this, she only asks it of the journal as it lies open before her.

And the journal makes no answer.

I wonder what answer you would have made, dear reader, if May had asked you instead?

CHAPTER VII.

"I DO SO WANT HER TO GO."

THE morning hours passed away, as hours always do, quickly enough. And though May once or twice wished that they would go quicker, I am not sure that the fairies were able to oblige her much in this respect, since the seconds and minutes were chasing one another, and pushing the hours along at the very top of their speed, and no one, not even minutes and seconds, can do more than they can, you know.

Perhaps the fairies themselves had not much leisure really to attend to the time, for May, what with one wish and another, kept them tolerably well employed ; and there is nothing like being busy to make one forget the way in which time is passing. Some very hard work, too, these poor fairies had

this morning, for May was perpetually wishing that the day would be fine ; so the patient fairies had to keep on rolling the clouds up and up the hills—very heavy work, too, those Welsh clouds are—and packing up the mists in fairy portmanteaux, so as to be quite ready the moment they were wanted again by the thirsty old Welsh giant, Cader. And the trouble they had to please May, and to persuade the sun to promise to shine all day long, nobody can conceive who is not well acquainted with the usual ways and habits of Welsh weather.

However, they did succeed after all, as people mostly do when they try hard. And now at noon, with a blue sky faintly flushed with soft white clouds, the day promises to be one of unexampled (in the history of Wales) loveliness.

May is ready dressed to receive her guests, actually in the new blue silk, about which she was so anxious last evening. The day is so bright and warm, that Mrs. Berkeley has decided that she is to wear it.

But to May the pleasure is a little bit spoiled by two circumstances : the one being that Alice Wynne—

who is a year older than herself, and somewhat of a rival—will not be there to see it ; and in the second place, she finds when she puts it on that it is quite short—shorter by a good bit than her every-day frocks, instead of being ever so much longer, as she had hoped. This, however, comforts her a little for the absence of Alice, who has her frocks quite down to the tops of her boots.

Boots, too ! Yes, that is another subject which troubles May a little while she is dressing. She is undecided between her old boots—which are, to be sure, a little shabby, and very thick—and her new ones, which are thinner, and a trifle, just the least trifle, short at the toes.

Jane decides her by advocating the cause of the old and thick boots : May at once, with the spirit of opposition which is natural to us all, I am afraid, wishes to put on the new ones. Her wish is of course fulfilled, and on the boots go. Jane confesses that they do suit better with the new silk dress than the old ones would do.

“But indeed, miss, you must take care of your new

frock, scrambling about," she observes, as she looks May over with some satisfaction.

"Oh yes, Jane, I'll take care."

But Miss May is not much given to "taking care," and Jane is rather surprised that her mistress has allowed the new silk to be put on for the occasion: she knows nothing of the fairy arrangements, of course.

As soon as May is dressed she goes downstairs. There is a little private plan of her own which she is very anxious to carry out, and of which she has as yet said nothing to any one. She is stopped halfway downstairs, however, by Cecil, who comes bounding towards her.

"I say, May, there's another visitor come to your party. Who do you think it is?"

"Another! What do you mean? Have Edith and Nelly brought somebody with them?"

"No, no. It's a grown-up visitor—a gentleman—somebody you were so sorry you couldn't have the other day because he was away."

"Not Mr. Griffith? Oh! Cecil, I do wish it was Mr. Griffith."

"And so it is. You go and [see; he's in the drawing-room now with mamma and Aunt Flo. Isn't it jolly his coming?"

"And he's going with us?"

"Of course he is; and it seems that Aunt Flo knew all about it last night, only she thought she wouldn't say, just to surprise you."

Mr. Griffith, the clergyman of the village near which Mwyngil is situated, is a great favourite with both the children, and a special favourite, it is suspected, with some of the elders too; at any rate, his advent is a satisfaction to all the party.

Edith and Nelly Richards arrive soon after. Edith is a tall girl of twelve, who does not say much; Nelly, a gay little romp of eight or thereabouts.

The carriage is already waiting at the door, packed with various hampers, suggestive of good things to come. There is no time for croquet; May might just as well have saved herself all that trouble last night, she thinks, as she gives a glance to the ill-arranged hoops.

The party have all to be stowed away in the brake: now is the moment for carrying out May's deeply-cherished design. She runs off, but in a moment re-appears with dolly, carefully wrapped up in a shawl, in her arms.

"My dear, you can't take that thing," observes papa, irreverently, of the baby.

"May, what nonsense!" exclaims mamma.

"Oh, mamma, please, I do so want her to go; she will be no trouble on my lap."

"Remember the coffee, May," from mamma; and, "There are packages and people enough without that, I should think," from papa.

But May holds firm to her wish.

"She isn't a package, nor a people either, papa," she pleads, "and I do so want her to go."

"Well, tumble in, then, goose, and please yourself. You're a spoilt child, and that's the long and the short of it, I suppose." And papa shakes his head very solemnly.

But May does not care much for that, since he helps her into the carriage with the baby in her

arms, and she can see by the twinkle in his eyes that he is not really angry.

Mrs. Berkeley looks a little more serious as May takes a seat in the brake by her.

"May, my dear, I do think it is very silly of you to bring it."

May takes her mother's hand and strokes it coaxingly.

"Mother dear, you did say I was to have everything my own way to-day."

"Did I? Well, really, I must say you are taking full advantage of your privileges."

Then she smiles too, and May knows it is all right.

Edith and Nelly quite sympathize with May, and are lost in admiration of the baby and the baby's clothes. Cecil is too busy at the moment, talking to Mr. Griffith about the horses, to notice the incident; but May does not quite escape his severe remarks. Directly he is in the carriage he discovers the fact of dolly's presence.

"Why, you never mean to say that you've brought that stupid thing with you!" he exclaims.

May means to say nothing about it. She receives the remark in dignified silence, supported, no doubt, by the sympathy and admiration of her female friends.

"Did ever you know such a stupid thing?" Cecil goes on, appealing to Mr. Griffith.

But Mr. Griffith professes to have a great weakness for dolls—baby dolls in particular—and wins May's eternal affection by offering to hold "the child" while she puts up her parasol. He takes it so gravely, and hushes it with so much devotion, that Cecil cannot say a word more on the subject; but he wonders in his own mind how it is that "a man who knows a good horse when he sees it can be such a muff," and supposes it is "because he's a parson, poor fellow!" All Cecil's heroes are soldiers, as are the heroes of all boys of twelve; and Cecil himself has quite resolved to be Commander-in-Chief of the British army before he has done with it, so that he naturally feels great compassion at times for his friend Mr. Griffith, who is "*such* a good fellow, and only a parson, you know."

However, these remarks and reflections are but as ripples on a summer sea. The party in the brake is a very merry one, and each man, woman, and child in it sets off with the determination of enjoying a very pleasant day.

The sky is clear, the air is fresh, and the horses' feet make music as they tramp along the road. What a pleasant sound it is, the even clatter of those nailed feet ! How it makes us envy our grandfathers and great-grandfathers in their leisurely travels, when railways were not, and the world went slower than it does for us !

The road, too, is a pleasant one (as what Welsh road is not ?)—winding along by wooded hills and deep valleys,—now through a shady lane, overhung by trees, and bordered with tall stately lady fern ; now by the bare mountain side, where the old grey crags rear their proud heads above the little world at their feet.

Clatter, patter, clatter : on our travellers go. Now they pass through a quiet village, where the grey stone cottages nestle in a background of green foliage ;

now they swing merrily over an old stone bridge, whose massive arches span some shallow tumbling stream, that lashes noisily over the boulders, and makes a thousand mimic waterfalls as it brawls along.

The children playing by the road stand aside, and *bob* as the carriage passes, or follow it with bunches of wild flowers in their hands as offerings for the ladies,—not altogether disinterested ones, perhaps, but who in this world is quite and altogether disinterested? It is a delightful drive, certainly; especially, May thinks, as it leads to those charming ruins, about which she is weaving in her active little brain all sorts of mysterious romances. She has read a poem somewhere—she can't remember quite where—about a haunted house, and it keeps constantly running in her mind :

“The flowers grew rankly as the weed,
Roses with thistles struggled for espial,
And vagrant plants of parasitic breed
Had overgrown the dial.”

She has made up her mind that this deserted

mansion of hers is to be exactly and in every respect like that in the poem ; and as for the tangled roses, this is, to be a perfect Rosamond's bower !

"I think we must be getting near this wonderful place of yours now, May," papa observes at length.

"Do you think we are, papa ? We must begin to look out, then."

"What do you think about lunch, Mary ?" he asks his wife. "Is it to be among the ruins ?"

"Well, I don't know, dear. We must see what sort of a place it is first. I always fancy ruins are damp and musty, myself."

"Oh ! but, mamma, they are *so* romantic, and——"

"Well, well, we will see, fairy !"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

“For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
‘The house is haunted!’”

IN a minute or two the carriage stops at a rather dilapidated-looking gateway.

“This is Dolbadarn, I believe, sir,” says John, touching his hat.

The gate leads into a park, and the drive is much overgrown with moss and weeds; but by the side of the gate is a pole, and on the top of the pole is a big board, and on the board, in freshly-painted white letters, are these words,—

“Trespassers will be prosecuted.”

"Hullo! what's that?" exclaims Mr. Berkeley, reading the board.

"Will you go up the drive, sir?" asks John, from the coachbox.

"Eh? Well, I don't know. What had we better do, mamma? No; I think we will get out and walk."

"What is the matter?" asks May, anxiously.

"Well, May, I am not quite sure that our visit will be acceptable, that's all. But perhaps we have not lighted on the right place."

John hastens to assure his master that this is without any doubt the deserted mansion in question, and also adds the information that "that there board was not up a few weeks ago."

And indeed the paint looks fresh and new. They all descend, however, and the carriage is directed to wait.

The rusty gate creaks heavily on its hinges, just as it ought to do, when they enter, and a feeling of delighted awe already begins to thrill through May.

They follow the moss-grown drive through the

park. At present there is no sign of a ruin anywhere, but the park is large and undulating. Presently they come to another gateway, more dilapidated even than the first.

"We must be getting near the ruins now, papa, I think ; don't you ? We shall come to the gardens first, of course.

" ' The mould was purple with unheeded showers
Of bloomy plums ; a wilderness it was
Of fruits, and weeds, and flowers.' "

May is beginning to feel quite excited and poetic.

"How still it is, isn't it ?" she says to Edith.
"That's right, of course ; haunted houses always are."

"Are they ?" returns Edith, who is a less excitable young lady than May ; "I always thought it was the noises about haunted houses that frightened people."

"Ah ! well, perhaps you're right. Listen : didn't you hear something then ?"

"I thought I heard a cow *mooring* at a distance."

"A cow !"

May feels quite offended that any sound so plainly

commonplace should be supposed to have disturbed the awful stillness of the haunted spot.

An exclamation from Cecil, who is on in advance, stops any reply.

"Here it is! here it is! here's your house!" and then immediately after follows a ringing peal of laughter, as Cecil disappears from sight behind a clump of trees. The laughter sounds more discordant and terrible to May than the *mooing* of the cow had done. In a moment Cecil comes running back, laughing with all his might.

"Oh, May, this is a sell! Come and look at your haunted house! Come and look at your romantic ruin! It's the most beautiful thing you ever saw in your life."

"There is *something*, for I can see it through the trees," May says, determined not to be laughed out of her ruin if she can help it.

"Oh yes, there's something, certainly. Come along, and see."

Another second brings them in sight of the building, and May's face grows very long indeed.

There is a ruin, certainly, if a square grey stone house without any window-frames can be called such ; but there is nothing in the least moss-grown or romantic about it. The stones have evidently just been cleaned down ; piles of timber and parcels of slates lie about in all directions. Immediately in front of the entrance is a great heap of mortar ; and the ruin has, it is clear, made up its mind to be a ruin no more.

Mr. Berkeley cannot help joining Cecil in his laugh against May.

"Well, this is a romantic spot to have chosen, I must say, fairy ! I don't think I will get you to take me for an outing again. What's to become of us ? We shall certainly be taken up for tramps or vagrants, if we don't take care."

"I should think it would be rather a pretty place when it is finished, only it lies, like all old houses, rather low," Mrs. Berkeley remarks, making a survey of the premises.

"Yes ; I should have pulled the thing to bits and begun fresh, if it had been me," returns her husband.

Edith Richards makes her voice heard, for a wonder. "I think this must be the place papa was talking about the other day," she remarks. "I did not know where we were coming, or I could have told you a Colonel somebody has bought it, and is going to rebuild it."

May is quite depressed.

"Oh dear, what a failure everything is!" she cries. "How I wish we had never come here at all!"

"I suppose the next best thing will be to go away as fast as ever we can," returns papa. "Don't you know the saying, 'It's no good crying over spilt milk'? or spoiled haunted houses, either; so come away. Who'll be at the gate first? Now for a race! Come, Griffith! come, children!"

Off they set, helter-skelter,—papa, Mr. Griffith, Cecil, and the girls.

"Stop, papa, stop! it's not fair; you've got a start; come back, come back!"

But papa is off, and there's no stopping him, and no coming up to him, either. Mr. Griffith does run him rather hard, certainly; but just as he is gaining

on him he catches his foot or stumbles over some little bit of rising ground, and in a moment down he is, flat on the greensward.

It is great fun—Mr. Griffith's tumble the best fun of all, particularly as he is not hurt, and doesn't seem to mind: perhaps it is a comfort to him that the ladies are not in sight. But he gets a great deal of rallying all round; and amid much laughter and merriment the whole party make their way out of the domains of the haunted house.

"But it *was* a horrible sell, you know," Cecil remarks, as the rusty gate swings heavily back on its hinges behind them.

The next thing to be thought of is dinner—dinner or luncheon, or whatever that nondescript meal may be which people partake of at picnics. Whatever its name, it makes a very important part of the day's proceedings.

First of all, the site has to be chosen, May's ruin not having proved available; and the choosing of the site is a matter of no small difficulty. There are so many things to be considered. It must be

dry ; it must be secluded ; it must be pretty ; it must not be sunny ; it must not be exposed to wind ; it must not be visited by gnats and midges ; it must not be too far from a stream of water ; it must not be too far for John to carry the hampers from the carriage.

At length, however, a spot which combines all these advantages is found. Everybody is getting *rather* hungry just about this time, or everybody might not have become so suddenly impressed with the peculiar suitability of the situation.

Then the business of the day commences. The hampers are unpacked, the cloth is spread, the plates are piled round, and the work of demolition begins.

May is in great glee.

"Isn't it lovely?" she asks delightedly of Aunt Flo, by whom she is sitting, with dolly stuck up by her side.

Aunt Flo says "Yes," but is rather uncertain whether May means the veal and ham pie which she is devouring, in spite of the sugar having been

upset all over it, or the fact that Mr. Griffith has just poured all the custard over the pickled salmon instead of the dressing intended for it.

But these small *contretemps* only add zest to the good appetite and fun of the party,—although there is a blank look on the faces of more than one when it is discovered that the corkscrew has been forgotten. After a while, however, mamma remembers that she has a little one somewhere in one of her pockets—a circumstance which creates a good deal of laughter against her; and after some fumbling it is produced and made use of, to the general satisfaction, although, as might have been expected, the champagne flies about in the most absurd way, and insists upon going everywhere except into people's glasses.

But now, when dinner is over, the question is, what is to be done with the rest of the afternoon.

"We can't have tea just directly, you know," May observes sadly, with the conviction that people who come out to a picnic are expected to do nothing but eat all day long.

The old trouble of the ruin returns.

"If that had only been a pretty place!" sighs our heroine.

"What a pity now we didn't go to the Druid mountain!" observes Cecil.

"There are some splendid slate quarries near here. What do you say to going to see one of them?" suggests Mr. Griffith.

"A slate quarry! Oh, Mr. Griffith, I'm sure nobody cares to go to such a place as that," exclaims May.

"Don't they, though?" this is from Cecil; "I do, for one, and so does Aunt Flo, and so does papa, and everybody but you, May. That is, I *think* so," glancing round him as he speaks.

Nelly creeps up to May and takes her hand.

"It's all in the dark, I believe!" she whispers.

"In the dark? Oh, how very horrid! Not that I'm afraid of the dark, though," May adds quickly, by way of correcting herself. "But what is there to see when one gets there? I know what slates are, and I'm sure one can see enough of them any day."

"You always object to everything that everybody else wants, May," Cecil remarks in a severe tone.

"Well, pray please yourself, and then I suppose you'll be happy," retorts that young lady; "and I am sure I hope your old quarry will turn out a success!"

May is rather cross, and has quite forgotten that by so expressing her wishes she has, thanks to the fairies, secured their fulfilment.

"It may easily turn out more of a success than your old ruin," is Cecil's rejoinder,—rather an unkind one, considering the concession which May has just made.

But then she did not do it very graciously, and that spoils everything, if people would only believe it.

On this point, may I be forgiven for offering one piece of good advice, dear reader? When you are giving up your own way, or doing a kind and good-natured action, do it kindly, or don't do it at all. It amounts in the end to exactly the same thing.

CHAPTER IX.

A VISIT TO A SLATE QUARRY.

PAPA finally decides the matter of the slate quarry.

"Let those go who want to go, and let those who don't want to go stay with mamma,"—mamma not being quite equal to the undertaking.

Nelly, having the fear of something "dark" before her eyes, decides to remain with Mrs. Berkeley; and at first May thinks that she will do the same—she and dolly; but no sooner have the rest of the party set off than the desire of seeing something new seizes upon our little heroine.

"I wish I had gone now," she says, rather dolefully, as she watches the retreating figures making their way up the mountain path.

"Then run, my child—run after them at once, and overtake them."

"Do you mind, mamma?"

"Mind! no, my darling. I will take care of Nelly; I think it will be too tiring an expedition for her. So run—be quick."

"Nelly, you take care of dolly for me, will you?"

May runs. "Stop, stop! wait a minute—wait for me!" she cries.

"What's the matter?"

"Only I'm coming, that's all."

"Oh, that's all, is it? Come along, then."

There is a slight halt, and then on they trudge again.

It is rather a steep road, that winds round the side of a mountain; but as they mount higher and higher a beautiful valley seems to spread itself out before them under their feet, and they wait every now and then to admire and rest.

Presently Mr. Griffith, who is leading the way, stops at a rough stone stile.

"This is the best way over the side of the moun-

tain," he says. "A very few minutes will take us to the other road, where the quarry is."

So on they go over the springy heather, with the fresh mountain breeze playing all sorts of pranks with their hair and their hats, and everything that its freakish fingers can lay hold of.

They are a merry party, and May cannot help enjoying herself, although she was rather determined when she set off that she wouldn't.

If it only wasn't for those unpleasant-looking black cattle scattered about all over the hill-side!

May, in spite of her six months' residence in Wales, has not yet got quite accustomed to them. She is a great deal too wise, and too much afraid of Cecil's laughter to say anything on the subject; but when one or two are standing very near the little pathway, she shuts her eyes as she passes—on the principle of the ostrich who, when he hides his head in the sand, thinks himself safe from pursuit. It is doubtful whether May is aware of that fact in natural history, but as the black cattle *don't* eat her up or otherwise injure her, it seems to be a good plan.

The exploring party cross the brow of the hill, and come down into a very different sort of valley to the one they have left on the other side: that clothed with trees and marked out in many-coloured squares of smiling fields, with a sparkling river winding like a thread of silver in the midst; this bare, bleak, and desolate, with little to break the grey monotony, for the row of quarrymen's cottages on the grey hill-side is grey too. Everything that is not made of slate in them is grey stone; but for the most part they are slate all over, even to the garden walls and the doorsteps.

The very hills seem made of nothing but bits of broken slates; just as if a mountain of slates had been chopped up into bits by an angry giant, and piled into heaps: and this is indeed just what has been done by a giant who can make himself very disagreeable at times, and whose name is *Gunpowder*.

"Well, I hope you call this pretty," observes Miss May to Cecil, who is walking beside her. She is determined not to be pleased if she can help it.

"Yes, very pretty—at least, very interesting."

returns Cecil. "*Pretty* is only a girl's word when she doesn't know how to call things by their right names. But what is that?"

It is a bugle-call sounding sharp and clear in the fresh mountain air, and wakening the echoes of the distant hills.

They all stop to listen.

"What can it be, I wonder? Oh! look at the little sheep running along, skipping over the broken slates. Poor things! perhaps it is the shepherd who is calling them," suggests May.

"Oh no, May; it can't be that. Do you know what it is for, papa?" asks Cecil.

Mr. Berkeley and Edith Richards have come up at the moment; Mr. Griffith and Aunt Flo are a little way on in front.

"Come along, children! come along quickly, and perhaps we shall see the blasting," says Mr. Berkeley.

"The blasting! Has the bugle anything to do with that?" asks Cecil.

"Yes, I know; it is to tell people to get out of the way," says Edith, who, being a little Welsh

girl, knows all the manners and customs of the natives.

"Then we'd better go the other way, hadn't we?" suggests May.

"Oh! never fear; we will get up where auntie and Mr. Griffith are, and then we shall be in a capital position. Who'll be there first? One, two, three, and away!" cries papa.

There is a race, which Cecil wins, of course; the two girls come up next, and Mr. Berkeley last.

"I am an old man, you know," he says, apologetically, as he joins the party.

Now that they are round the brow of the hill, they have an excellent view of a slate quarry opposite to them. It is a great open pit cut out into shelves, and with little railways running from one shelf to another, down which, every now and then, little waggons full of slates come rattling, with a great bustle and noise.

"Is that the place we are going to see?" asks May of Mr. Griffith.

"No; we are going to another quarry a little farther up the valley, but we may as well look at

this as we go. How would you like to run down the hill in one of those dear little waggons?"

"Oh, not at all! You don't mean to say you are going to do that, Mr. Griffith? Why, it is just like coming down the side of a house!"

Mr. Griffith looks doubtfully at Aunt Flo. "Don't be alarmed, Miss Berkeley," he says, smiling; "I think we shall be able to manage without that."

"But I should like to go up and down in one of those waggons," observes Cecil.

"Would you? The consequences might be serious. You might be turned into a slate before you were aware of it, possibly," laughs Mr. Berkeley. "But look! that is where they are going to blast—just opposite."

"What do you mean by *blasting*?" asks May: "blowing the horn?"

Just then the horn does blow again.

"Well, that was not exactly the blast I meant, though it seemed like it: I mean that they are going to blow up a little piece of the rock with gunpowder."

"Gunpowder! Oh, papa!"

May slips her hand into Mr. Berkeley's, and feels safer.

"It won't hurt us where we are; but see how all the men are running: that is to get out of the way of the explosion."

"There's the man with the gunpowder; I see him!" cries Cecil, delighted. All boys seem to have a natural love of gunpowder in them.

"Yes, he has it in a kind of little horn. Do you see? He is going to put it in a hole which has been drilled in the rock. Then he will set light to it and run off," explains Mr. Griffith.

"Just like Guy Fawkes, isn't it?" says May, getting excited too.

They see the whole process, and then have to wait for the explosion.

"I wish it would come," Edith says, rather nervously.

She and May are both standing with their hands over their ears to keep out the sound. May tries very hard not to do so, but really she can't help it

The explosion, after all, is not very terrible, though it does make a good deal of noise as it echoes from one side of the hill to the other. Then there is a burst of white smoke, a little bit of rock falls over and over, and then, one by one, the men creep out of their hiding-places.

The horn sounds again.

"That is to say all is safely over," observes Mr. Griffith. "Now we can go on ; we shall be at the other quarry in a minute."

May cannot help feeling glad to hear that there is no more fear of being blown up, though she does not confide her feelings to any one.

Mr. Berkeley's next remark is not very reassuring.

"I suppose a good many accidents happen in these quarries?" he observes to Mr. Griffith.

"A great many, I am afraid. Indeed, a man in my parish told me they were of almost daily occurrence."

"Indeed! It seems a pity that some better method of applying the powder cannot be adopted, does it not?"

The two gentlemen walk on, and engage in a little learned discussion. May goes to Aunt Flo.

"Do *you* like quarries, auntie?"

"Yes, dear; I think it will be very interesting."

"And you are not afraid of being blown up, or anything?"

"No, not in the least; I am sure that Mr. Griffith would not take us into any danger." And Aunt Flo's face is so bright and pretty as she speaks, that May feels somewhat comforted.

"I will keep close by you, auntie."

"Very well, dear."

They are now just at the entrance of the other quarry—the one they have really come to see. It is rather a steep mount up to it, over a rough path of loose slates. May begins to wish her new boots anywhere but on her feet.

However, the top is soon reached. Mr. Griffith secures a guide from among the workmen,—a bright, intelligent-looking young man, who speaks English like a foreigner,—and they begin their explorings.

Little waggons are being drawn up and down the almost perpendicular sides of the hill; and Mr. Griffith, glancing up at them, asks Aunt Flo whether she would like to try that style of locomotion. But Aunt Flo shakes her head doubtfully, and they all follow their guide to the entrance of a little tunnel, which is cut out of the rock. Everything is small in Wales, —the sheep, the fowls, the people, the railways, and even the tunnels.

May, who has hold of Aunt Flo's hand, loosens it a moment to turn to Edith.

"It *is* dark really: Nelly said it was."

"Is it?" May cannot quite make out from Edith's face whether she likes the prospect of the adventure or not.

Two little empty slate waggons are found close at hand; some impromptu seats—old boxes turned upside down—are arranged in them for the use of the ladies, and they are invited to enter.

Aunt Flo, May, and Mr. Griffith are in one little waggon; papa, Cecil, and Edith, in the other. Two workmen push them along, and the little carriages

slide easily and quickly into the darkness of the tunnel.

How dark it is! and how cold! May thinks she has never in her life felt any cold half so great. And what are these great drops that come splashing down on her hat, and actually—yes, actually on her blue silk dress? It can't be raining here, surely! "Auntie, what is it?" she asks, looking up into the darkness: and just then a big drop comes splash on the tip of her nose.

"Well, this may be pleasure," May thinks all to herself, "but for my own part, I don't think I should call it so!"

"The tunnel is dripping very much, certainly," says Aunt Flo.

"So it is: I'll put up my umbrella." This is Mr. Griffith's voice, but *where* he is, of course nobody can discover. However, he manages to put his umbrella so as to shelter Aunt Flo, and May too, who creeps quite close to her.

"That's right! Now I can put my shawl round you, May."

"Yes, auntie, and give me your hand. It's nice to have hold of somebody's hand here in this place. Don't you think so?"

Aunt Flo laughs as she gives May a hand, and says, "Perhaps so." But her sweet musical laugh sounds hollow and strange in the damp, dark tunnel, and makes May shudder a little.

"Don't, auntie," she says, pleadingly. "It doesn't sound right, somehow."

On they go—rumble, rumble, rumble, through the darkness: it really seems as if it would never end.

Papa's cheery voice is quite a comfort. "I say, Griffith, where are you taking us? Remember, if we're never seen or heard of any more, you're responsible."

"All right, Mr. Berkeley; we shall soon be at the other end now."

But just then there is a dead stop.

"It looks like the other end of nowhere, I think," returns Mr. Berkeley.

May looks about her; she is beginning to be able

to see quite well in the darkness, and can almost distinguish papa's face as he turns it towards her.

The stoppage is occasioned by the unpleasant fact that another little waggon is coming along the same lines in an opposite direction. There is a great deal of guttural shouting in an unintelligible tongue—unintelligible at least to May. The difficulty is solved by the waggon which is coming towards them being turned off on another line of rails, for just at this point the tunnel widens out, so as to admit the two side by side.

Then on the travellers go again merrily, with the end of the tunnel well in view, and the light coming quicker and brighter. At last they are at the journey's end, and May is by no means sorry to jump out of the waggon.

They are in the quarry now : on all sides of them rise the grey mountain walls ; only above is the blue sky. Cecil whispers to his sister,—

“I say, May, don't you feel like a fly at the bottom of an empty jam pot ?”

And May, though it had not occurred to her before,

begins to think that she does; only the grey walls surrounding them are not smooth and shiny, like the sides of a jam-pot, but vaulted and cavernous; and from the kind of broad terrace where they are standing they can look into a deep yawning pit, the bottom of which is hidden from them by clouds of dense white smoke.

"What is all that down there?" May asks, as she peeps somewhat timidly over.

"That is where the men are at work," explains the guide.

"What! down there in all that smoke? How can they breathe?" asks Cecil.

The guide smiles a curious little smile, and supposes it is because they are used to it.

"How many men are at work there?" he is asked.

"Oh, a hundred, probably; there are about eight hundred men altogether employed in the quarry."

The guide points to various round holes in different parts of the rock, from most of which the white smoke is issuing. "There are men in all these workings," he remarks.

"Is the work all underground, then?" asks Mr. Berkeley.

"In this quarry entirely so," the guide tells them.

"Is it all dark? How do they see?" May asks, remembering her recent experiences in the tunnel.

"Oh! they have candles," she is told.

May was beginning to wonder whether if one lived in the dark long enough, one might not be able to see in it, as people say cats can do.

"How long do the men have to stay in these workings?" asks Aunt Flo.

May thinks that half an hour would be quite as long as anybody could bear it.

"From six in the morning till five in the evening," the man tells them, speaking half in English and half in Welsh, so that Mr. Griffith has to interpret for them a good deal.

"But sometimes," he adds, "if the air is very bad, the men have to be relieved at the half-day."

"Poor fellows! I should think so."

May creeps up to Mr. Berkeley's side. "Papa, I

shall never think slates uninteresting any more, now that I see how much trouble they are to get."

"Ah! my little girl; we have but a small idea of the labour, and suffering too, I am afraid, required to supply our every-day luxuries."

"Do you call slates luxuries?" asks Aunt Flo, rather wickedly.

Mr. Berkeley laughs. "It is too bad of you, Flo, to pick me to pieces in that way, when I am trying to 'point a moral and adorn a tale.'"

However, they are all rather glad to get up a little laugh; for the thought of those poor fellows down in the underground workings is oppressive.

"What a life to lead! How miserable they must be!" May had just been thinking to herself. But it does not seem so, for at that moment the sound of men's voices singing reaches her ear. "Listen, papa. What can it be?" she says.

They are all following their guide along a rather narrow terrace, which leads into a huge cavern: on one side of them is a precipice, awful in its cloudy mystery of white smoke. May has her papa's hand;

she cannot venture to look over ; but the sound of voices comes, she feels sure, from out of that white smoke, far, far below.

They stop to listen. Yes, it is a hymn, wafting its sweet harmonies through the murky air.

The guide explains. "They have been holding a prayer-meeting."

"What, down there?"

"Yes."

The visitors follow their conductor. Turning a corner sharply, they find themselves in another cavern, as huge and apparently as bottomless as the one they have quitted. There is a great square hole high up in the rocky roof, which admits the light, and they are standing on a wooden bridge which spans the wide arch, and is suspended from huge iron hooks in the rock. The bridge has a handrail, so May can venture to look over this and peer down into the gulf beneath. Nothing is to be seen but clouds of white smoke, far, far below.

"How deep is it?" she asks.

Some hundreds of feet, the man tells them ; and

there are three floors of bridges underneath them, just like the one they are on, one under the other. The men are working in the lowest of all.

They cross this bridge, go under a rocky arch, and find themselves in just such another great vault, spanned in the same way with another bridge, and they gaze again into the same unfathomable depths. There are twenty such chambers, their guide tells them.

So, after they have gone through one or two more, they retrace their steps, followed all the way by the sweet musical chant of the workers underground; now fainter, now louder, as it pierces or fails to pierce the smoke-laden air: it has a strange, weird effect in this place, and yet a pleasant and a soothing one; telling of the faith and hope that may shine brightly, even in the darkest of earth's corners, and beautify even the humblest and the hardest life.

May was very glad of the hymn; it seemed to take away the terror and wildness of the scene, and yet to rob it of none of its grandeur and beauty.

"Well, my little girl, what do you think of a slate quarry now?" Mr. Berkeley asks, putting his arm round his little daughter.

"Oh, papa, I am so glad I came: I had no *idea*, you know, what it was like."

But when Cecil comes up and remarks that "this is rather better than that dirty old ruin," May will not confess to utter defeat, but retorts that "really as to dirt she can't say much for his wonderful quarry," which is quite true; for it is not the cleanest place in the world, and the visitors have to skip about like goats to avoid splashing into the puddles.

"Now we must go into the shed and see the slates split, and then our round will be finished, I think," observes Mr. Griffith.

"What do you mean by splitting?" May asks.

She soon finds out, when they get into the shed. It certainly was the funniest thing in the world to see a row of boys sitting on the ground with a great block of stone before each. There seemed nothing to do but to stick a knife in at one corner, just the thickness wanted, and off the slate came

in a moment, like a sheet of blotting-paper from a pad.

"That's the part I should like," May observes to Mr. Berkeley.

"Ah ! lazy child, I see ; because it looks easy : but I should not wonder if some patience and knack were not required to split the slates so neatly. There is one circumstance, you know, under which it is easy to do everything."

"What is that ?" May asks.

"When you know how to do it," said her father.

CHAPTER X.

GIPSYING.

THE quarry exploring party come down the mountain at great speed, scorning all foot-paths and landmarks in their headlong career; indeed, they very nearly lose themselves and get down into the wrong valley.

No matter: some one among them fortunately has the bump of locality—whatever that remarkable organ may be,—and the travellers are saved generally from a fate so disastrous.

May having borrowed papa's walking-stick, uses it as an alpenstock, and the children amuse themselves by being make-believe travellers on the snow-clad mountains, surmounting insurmountable difficulties, of course, as travellers always do.

They succeed at last in coming safely to the end of their journey, and find mamma and Nelly anxiously awaiting them, and tea in course of preparation.

"Ah, this is delightful!" cries May, clapping her hands. "Real gipsy life beginning in earnest."

There is the kettle swinging between the poles over a heap of sticks and heather, which John has collected, and already beginning to smoulder and crackle. It may be some little time before the kettle boils, to be sure, the sticks being damp and the wind high; but these are trifling annoyances, which time and patience will no doubt overcome—seeing that time and patience do work such wonders. Meanwhile, it is delightful to feel that one is going to be a real gipsy, and have tea after a long walk—*by-and-by*.

It is a merry circle that gathers around the smouldering sticks. Of course there is much to hear and much to relate; in fact, they all talk so fast and so together, and there is such an amount of laughing and joking, that mamma declares at last, no one is giving her a description of anything, but that they are only playing the game of "who

shall make the worst pun," and really, all are so bad that it is impossible to say who is the winner.

"At any rate, the expedition seems to have turned out a success," she observes. But at the same moment her eyes alight on the skirt of May's dress. "My dear May, what is that? What have you done to your frock?"

"My frock, mamma?" And May turns round and round in a vain attempt to look at her own tail.

Everybody feels inclined to laugh, only that everybody's attention is also attracted to the fact that poor May's blue silk frock, short as it is, has come to grief. All round the back, for a couple of inches up, it is ornamented with a rim of thick clayey mud.

"I never saw such a child! But where could you get the mud from, I wonder?" says Mrs. Berkeley.

"Oh! mamma, it must have been in that horrid tunnel, I suppose; nobody could help getting muddy there, I'm sure."

"Nobody else seems to have suffered in the same way."

"Why, of course you should have held your dress up," suggests Edith. But the suggestion comes rather late.

"So I should—at least, that is, I think I did; only I thought it was so short, you know."

Mamma smiles. "Well, never mind, May. But I don't think I shall let you have your own way again, when you want to wear your new frock."

May groans in spirit. She cannot trust herself to say anything, because she feels rather choky and inclined to cry, and she does not want to be thought a baby. But saying nothing, she thinks the more, and the burthen of her reflections is, that she is a very ill-treated and hardly-used little girl.

"As for the frock, I only wish I'd never seen the ghost of it!" she says in her own mind, very crossly,—
"nor the boots either, for the matter of that!" For just at this moment they are making themselves felt and remembered, in a most aggravating way.

Indeed, mountaineering in short boots is not the most agreeable amusement in the world, and is apt at times, added to other things, to be trying to the

temper; so May must be excused for being cross. But as she kept all these remarks to herself, the fact of her being in a bad temper was quite a secret from the rest of the party, except from mamma. For mammas have a wonderful knack of knowing all that their little daughters are thinking and feeling, by means of a certain little electric telegraph set up in their hearts by old Dame Nature, and which makes it impossible for their children to feel or suffer anything which is not felt or suffered in an equal degree by themselves.

So when presently May happens to pass by where Mrs. Berkeley is sitting, she draws the little girl to her and kisses her; and May, though no word is spoken between them, working that same little electric telegraph in her own heart, knows the kiss to mean,—

“I saw that you were cross and put out just now, darling, and I saw, too, your struggle towards self-conquest. That little kiss is to show that your mother is watching and loving and approving you” —a faint type and shadow of the Mightier Love,

which is ever watching and helping, in the great life-struggle towards the Eternal good.

May is comforted by the soft pressure of her mother's lips. The sunshine steals back into her heart.

"Yes, I did try," she says to herself, "and mamma couldn't know how hard it was, because she didn't know about the boots."

You see nobody does know all the trials which beset another, and therefore we ought always to be ready to make allowances for one another. For instance, we can't know all about the *boots*.

The fire does begin to burn up after a time, and the kettle boils—at last.

It is great fun, certainly. John has fetched a can of cream from a cottage; the tea is made, and the whole party settles down into a state of comfortable repose. Incessant demands are made upon Mr. Griffith, who has volunteered to be the general bread-cutter; and mamma's arm, when she has to pour out the fifth round of cups, aches horribly, in spite of the assistance she receives from Aunt Flo and everybody.

How much bread-and-butter and cake was consumed on the occasion, is almost impossible to compute; but the amount was, I assure you, fabulous. And beyond that who can go, or desire to go?

But, unfortunately, one cannot keep on drinking tea, and eating cake and bread-and-butter, for ever, even under the most favourable auspices; and so at last even this merry party have to desist, and papa gives the signal for the horses to be put to the carriage.

Then there is a great gathering of fragments and clattering together of teacups. Everybody has forgotten that he or she was tired out an hour ago, and each desires to be extremely useful and busy about something. May has even forgotten her boots. So when it is suggested that some one shall carry the empty milk-can to the cottage, she volunteers to go, and Cecil offers to accompany her. Edith Richards, too, says she will be of the party; and off they set—the three, or rather the four—for on this occasion dolly makes one. It is not very far a little way along the lane, then across a couple of

fields, and over the stepping-stones, and there is the cottage right in front of them.

A pretty bright-eyed little Welshwoman, in a low round hat and bright-coloured short dress, meets them at the door of the cottage, and receives the empty can. She can speak but very little English; but Edith says a few words to her in Welsh. She invites the young party to enter and rest a minute or two, with an evident desire to show off the cleanliness of her little domain, where, on the oaken dresser, the pewter and brass are shining like gold and silver. The children thank her, and peep in shyly, but decline.

Then the little Welshwoman says a word about the baby in Welsh to Edith; and Edith interprets it to May. She takes dolly to be a *real* baby, and actually inquires how old it is!

May is in ecstasies, and is almost inclined not to undeceive her, only that she cannot withstand the delight of showing off all the beauties of dolly's wax arms, blue eyes, and flaxen hair.

Finally the whole party take leave of one another, mutually pleased, and the children set off back again.

As they are going to cross the brook, however, May suddenly remembers her dress.

"Oh dear me!" she exclaims, "I forgot to hold my frock up when we were coming, and I do believe I've got it wet again."

"Yes, that you have!" says Edith, consolingly.

"How tiresome, to be sure!"

"Let me take the baby," suggests Edith.

"Well, thank you, if you will, just a minute."

Cecil is across the brook and on in front a little way: he turns round now.

"Hullo, May! what's the matter? Oh! that stupid doll in the way,—I see. Don't bother Edith, and turn her into a doll's nursery-maid. Give it to me; I'll hold it for you a minute."

Cecil really means to be good-natured; but May's fears are all aroused. See what it is to establish a bad character! Edith is across the brook with dolly— in her arms; May, in the middle of the stepping— stones, sees her being surrendered into Cecil's awkward grasp. She stops, and calls out in her maternal distress,—



"No, no, Cecil, I won't have it ! Leave her alone ! You shan't have her !"

The excited tone unfortunately rouses Cecil's spirit of mischief. His awkwardness suddenly increases, and he makes a feint of dropping his precious burden altogether.

May screams out ; and being intent on watching Cecil is not careful of her own footsteps : in an unwary moment she slips, and finds herself seated on a big boulder, with her feet in the water.

Cecil bursts out laughing, and gives the *baby* a malicious toss into the air.

May looks so comical sitting there that Edith can't help laughing a little, too. But poor May does not at all see the joke of it, and Edith does her best to recover her gravity.

"Make Cecil give you back my dolly !" May calls out, even before she thinks of lifting her toes out of the stream.

"Do give her back to me, Cecil," pleads Edith, who feels guilty in having surrendered her trust.

But Cecil will not. "Nonsense ! I won't hurt the

thing," he returns, contemptuously. "Come along, May!"

May scrambles out, damp, cross, and uncomfortable.

"Give me the doll, Cecil! Do you hear? Give it me, directly! How dare you!" she cries, as Cecil tosses it up and down in his arms.

"Listen to her—just listen to her!" he cries, mockingly, "with her *shalls*, and *wills*, and *how dare you's*! Perhaps you'd like to slap my face again, as you did last night, May—eh?"

May feels very indignant, and would like nothing better than to retaliate in some such fashion, only that she knows it is not considered the most ladylike proceeding in the world, and she is intensely annoyed that Cecil should remind her of it before Edith Richards. The colour mounts up all over her face, though she tries her hardest to look unconcerned.

"Cecil, what nonsense you talk!" she says, frowning at him as though to implore silence.

But Cecil quite disregards the hint.

"But you know you did, May," he persists.

"Give me back my doll," returns May, crossly.

"I tell you what: if you'll beg my pardon for slapping my face last night, I'll give you back your doll—that is, if you ask for it properly, you know. There's a bargain. Don't you think it's quite fair, Edith?"

Edith does not know. "Oh! I'd give her back the doll, any way," she says.

"Not unless she begs my pardon," returns Cecil.

"But I won't!"

May feels herself to be in a very hard case. Last night or this morning May would willingly have told Cecil she was *sorry* for that unlucky slap, which has indeed weighed a little on her conscience; but to have it brought up against her now—before Edith Richards, too!—and to be forced to confession with the alternative of seeing her new doll ill-treated, and at the very moment when she is damp and cold and cross from her recent dip into the brook! All this is too much for any little girl's temper to stand—certainly too much for May's.

"If I did slap your face, you quite deserved it; and I'd do it again now, this minute, if I'd the chance

—there !” cries May, almost in tears with worry and excitement.

Cecil rushes off across the field, with dolly in his arms. “Catch me if you can, that’s all !—catch me if you can,” he shouts.

May and Edith pursue him.

“Give me my doll ! You shall give it me ! I will have it !” cries May.

It was the greatest pity in the world that it did not occur to May that her plan should have been just to *wish* for it, simply ; for the fairies were hovering about, anxious to oblige their little favourite, only waiting for her to express her wishes, in order that they might fulfil them—quite melancholy, in short, at having nothing to do.

But May gave them no chance ; she was so angry that she would talk in nothing but the imperative mood ; and so the fairies could do nothing, since it is well known that fairies are quite unable to help people who only use “wills, shalls, and how dare you’s,” as Cecil called them.

On they go, Cecil with dolly in his arms, May

and Edith following helter-skelter across the fields; May shouting at the very top of her voice in angry remonstrance, and Cecil laughing in derision.

"Ah! we shall soon get back to papa and mamma," thinks May. "That will be a good thing; then Cecil will be obliged to give me up my dolly, if he doesn't break her first."

Cecil, too, knows that his "fun" must soon be over; and to prolong it a few moments, just as he reaches the stile he makes a sudden spring up into an oak tree which overhangs the lane. He is as nimble as a young monkey. One spring, and up he goes, with poor dolly swinging head downwards from his irreverent hand.

May and Edith stand beneath the tree, and gaze helplessly upwards; but May is by no means disposed to suffer in silence.

"Cecil! Cecil!" she cries, wrathfully, "give me my doll, you naughty boy! Do you hear?"

"Will you catch her?" asks Cecil, pretending to throw her down.

May shrieks in her maternal alarm.

Then Cecil makes the dolly sit up on a branch of the tree, and talks to her mockingly, in the approved nurse-and-baby style.

"And it was a ducksey darling, it was, a-sitting on a breezy-treezy," he says. "Take care it doesn't fall downy-powny and hurt its little selfy-pelfy."

May is driven to desperation. "It would serve *you* right if you fell down and hurt yourself," she cries in her anger; "and I'm sure I wish you may!"

No sooner are the words out of her lips than a sudden terrible thought strikes across her mind, and she would have given all—yes, all she possessed in the world—to recall them, when too late. Of course she didn't mean them! Of course she was only in a pet!

But, alas! how were the fairies to know that?—the poor patient fairies, who had been waiting so long for the mere expression of a wish from her!

May could never exactly remember how it all happened. Looking back upon the scene afterwards, it always seemed to her that a great black cloud came suddenly down from the sky with a crash and a roar,

and enveloped her in its chilling folds, blotting out for a while all sights and sounds; and that when at last it cleared a little, and daylight came again, a blank yawning chasm lay between her and the things of the past: it seemed almost as if years had gone by, so changed were all her thoughts and feelings.

She stands pressing her hands to her throbbing temples, with a dim consciousness of having been angry or disturbed about something—some very trifling matter—long ago! what it was she has forgotten.

Discarded dolly lies on the ground, one waxen arm all smashed to pieces. May never so much as turns to give her a glance of pity. One terrible remembrance, one terrible fact, is about her every thought. "*I wished it,*" groans poor May in her agony, while Cecil, speechless and motionless, lies on her feet.

She kneels by his side; she takes his hand. "Speak to me, Cecil!—oh! speak to me!" she cries. No sound comes.

May looks up at Edith with a pitiful blank despair.

"Don't be frightened, dear," Edith says, kindly ; but her own face is white, and a horrible terror takes hold of her, as she sees that Cecil does not move, nor answer May's appeals.

"I will call Mr. Berkeley," she says. "See, there is the carriage close by." She runs off on her sad errand.

May stays by Cecil, holding his hand, and talking, talking all the time—begging him to open his eyes, to say that he is not hurt—that he will soon be quite well !

But Cecil neither speaks nor moves.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

IN a very few seconds Mr. Berkeley and Mr. Griffith are by the side of the injured boy, but to May it seems hours before they reach her.

And when they do come, there is a fixed white look on her father's face, which frightens her more than anything else had done. He, too, kneels down by the little prostrate figure: as he does so that terrible look passes away.

"Thank God!" he says, as he raises the boy in his arms.

The faint breath comes fluttering over Cecil's lips as his father lifts him. He opens his eyes.

"What shall we do? Will you carry him to the carriage?" asks Mr. Griffith.

"I am so afraid of alarming his mother," is the reply. "Cecil, my lad"—turning to him—"do you think you could walk?"

Cecil's eyes turn languidly upon his father. He smiles and nods, but as his foot touches the ground he groans.

"He's badly hurt, I'm afraid," observes Mr. Griffith. "Is it your leg that pains you so, Cecil?" he asks.

"My foot—my ankle," groans Cecil, evidently in great pain.

"Do you think the bone can be broken?" asks Mr. Berkeley, nervously.

Mr. Griffith stoops and passes his hand carefully over the injured part.

And all the while May stands by listening, her face white, and with such a sad, sad pain at her heart! No one speaks to her, or indeed thinks about her: every one's attention is naturally occupied with Cecil; but in May's head and in May's heart the words are thumping, thumping, with ceaseless melancholy iteration,—*"You did it, you did it —"*

you did it," until at last May feels quite sure that some one must be saying them out loud to her ; and she feels sure that her papa and Mr. Griffith are looking at her reproachfully, knowing that she is the cause of all this suffering and trouble.

"It is a sprain," at length Mr. Griffith pronounces. "I don't think there is any appearance of a broken bone, do you, Berkeley ?—feel."

"I think I am all right now, papa," Cecil says, in a weak voice. "Where am I ? How stupid of me ! What made me fall, I wonder ?"

As he speaks, May shrinks away out of his sight, with a feeling of guilt and misery impossible to describe.

"I think I can walk now: let me try," says Cecil. But as he puts his foot to the ground a groan escapes him. "Oh no ! I can't," he adds, piteously ; and the subdued tone of suffering, so different to Cecil's ordinary voice, cuts May to the heart.

A little consultation is held.

"I think, after all, the best thing will be to carry him to the carriage and get him home as quickly as

possible," says Mr. Berkeley. "Run on, May, and tell mamma that Cecil has fallen and hurt himself—a little, you know: don't frighten her."

But at this moment Mrs. Berkeley and Aunt Flo are seen approaching. Mrs. Berkeley claps her hands, as a special signal to attract attention.

"Come, come!" she calls out, "the carriage is waiting, and so are we. What are you so long about, you folks?"

"Run at once, May, and tell her," urges papa, "or she will find it out for herself, and be alarmed."

But May's feet refuse to do his bidding: she absolutely *cannot* go.

"All right; I'll walk on quickly and tell Mrs. Berkeley, if you can manage Cecil," says Mr. Griffith.

Mr. Berkeley gives a glance now towards May, surprised at her backwardness in obeying his wish. He is struck by the expression of her face: the child certainly looks both ill and scared.

"Poor little woman!" he says, caressingly; "of course you were frightened! You saw it all, didn't you? How did it happen?"

But May has not a word to answer. She tries to speak ; her lips move, but no sound comes, and she turns away.

"Poor little fairy!" says her father ; "come along ; it's all right, thank God! He might have been killed, you know."

Yes, May knows.

How very terrible it all is! Every word that is spoken seems to cut deeper into her heart. But the worst is yet to come, when mamma, with her patient, sad face, turns from her suffering boy to speak a few words of comfort and praise to May ; for she, too, notices how ill and frightened her little girl looks.

Edith has related how, while they were at play, Cecil climbed the tree and fell, and how May, after the accident, stayed by his side and held his hand, while she, Edith, ran for help.

"There's my brave, good May!" mamma says, softly, as they walk in sad procession—papa on in front with his almost senseless burden and Edith forming the rear, with the shattered doll—unlucky cause of disaster—in her arms.

May shrinks away from me and falls back beside Edith.

"Poor dolly has fared the worst, I think," Edith observes, trying to turn the current of May's thoughts.

But May has no thought to give to her favourite now.

"I wished it, you know, and it came true!" she says, in a hoarse whisper.

Edith has forgotten what she is referring to. Perhaps she never heard the words; if so, they made no impression.

"You wished what?" she asks.

But just then a groan from poor Cecil reaches them: it stops all answer to the question.

"Oh, don't! don't!" May cries, as though she had been struck; "I can't—I really can't bear it!"

It is a sad drive home again, although the road is as picturesque, the lights and shadows on the mountains as beautiful as they were some hour ago, and the glorious hush and glow of a summer twilight is stealing over everything. But a shadow

has fallen on the hearts of our little party—all the deeper by contrast with the brightness of the day ; and Nature displays her beauties to them in vain.

Very few words are spoken. A little impromptu couch has been made for Cecil across the carriage, and there he lies, white, silent, and suffering, with his mother's arm around him, and his hand in hers. Now and then he moans, as the carriage jolts over some stone in the road ; at other times he lies so still that he may almost be sleeping.

May crouches away out of his sight in the farthest corner of the carriage. Will those terrible words never stop—"You wished it, you wished it"? She hears them in the tramp of the horses' feet, in the flutter of the evening breeze ; she cannot escape them.

At times a sense of drowsiness overcomes her. It seems wicked of her to be sleepy while Cecil is lying there in pain ; and she struggles hard against the feeling,—but in vain. A mist swims before her eyes, her head aches, her hands burn : and her feet ! why cannot she take her feet out of that cold, cold brook ?

Poor little May! She is but dimly conscious of what is going on around her during the latter part of the drive home; she scarcely knows when the carriage stops and she is lifted out of it by kind strong arms. Yet she remembers afterwards that she did walk into the house and up the stairs—up, up, and up, until at last Jane had to carry her the rest of the way and put her into bed; but after that she does not remember much that happened to her for a long time.

At least, she is not sure, though she knows the fairies all came round her, no longer playful and merry, but quiet and sorrowful, with severe, dark faces; and though she shuts her eyes as tight as she possibly can, she can still see them, and still hear the one sad sentence that they din into her ears,—“You wished it!” and she knows, though no one tells her so, that Cecil is dead. She can hear her mother’s weeping, and see her father’s white face full of sad, stern reproach as he looks at her; for he knows that it is her fault—that she “wished it”; and though she tries to tell them all

that she did not mean it, she cannot find one word to say.

And so the weary days pass on, until at last May opens her eyes to a bright sunny morning, and her senses awake to a fragrant smell of mignonette, and to the joyful singing of birds that come to her through her open bedroom window; and looking up, she sees her mother's face bending over her,—not sad and reproachful, though a tear is certainly glistening in her eye. For a moment May gazes up into that gentle, loving face, and takes her fill of happiness. Then it seems all to come back to her—all the past misery and sense of guilt, and she turns away uneasily.

But mamma will not have it so. "My darling," she says, in her sweetest, softest tone, "you have been ill, but you are going to get better now, please God." And so she takes the child into her arms.

May's head nestles cosily against her mother's bosom—against a knot of bright blue ribbons on her dress. Her eyes seem fascinated by that blue knot; she passes her hand wonderingly over it. It

is real. She raises her eyes to her mother's face with a question on her lips.

But before she can frame the sentence, a noise in the room attracts her. The door opens softly, and papa enters with something—with somebody—in his arms.

"I have brought the head-nurse, mamma," he says, in a soft sick-room tone, putting down his burthen in a low chair that is standing ready by the open window.

Mamma lays her finger on her lips. "Hush!" she says.

But May has heard—has seen. A strange look—first of absolute terror, changing by degrees into surprise and joy, intense, wonderful joy—comes over her face. She stretches out her arms with a low cry to Cecil, and then falls back weeping and sobbing in her mother's arms.

For there is Cecil! the head-nurse, as papa is pleased to call him,—Cecil himself, as well and bright as ever, sitting in the low chair by the open window, his fair curls blown about by the summer

breeze. He is none the worse for his tumble from the tree, except a little weakness about the ankle, which the doctor promises will pass off in a few days now, if he will be good, and not use his foot.

The sudden joy and excitement are almost enough to make May ill again—only they don't ; for from that minute she gets much, much better ; and it soon becomes a matter of a race between her and Cecil which is to be considered quite well first. I am not sure which wins ; but I know that they are both pronounced well enough to be present at Aunt Flo's and Mr. Griffith's wedding, which takes place just three weeks after the day of the accident.

And on the twelfth day of August in that same year, Cecil, utterly forgetful of sprained ankles or other obstacles, is tramping merrily over the Welsh hills after the grouse, by his father's side, learning, as he says, to be a good sportsman and a fine old English gentleman.

Possibly, too, during those days of anxious watching by his little sister's sick bed, he has learnt some other things which will be quite as useful to him in

after life as that science of grouse shooting; for though his heart is as light, and his spirits as joyous as ever, he has not since that times taken pleasure in teasing other people to the same extent as formerly, and rarely now attempts his old amusement of getting "a rise" out of May.

One remarkable circumstance, too, must be mentioned.

When May recovered from her illness, dolly's broken arm was found to be whole and restored, and Cecil's pocket-money was suspected to be at an unusually low ebb. Whether there was any connection between the two facts we must leave to the opinion of our discerning readers. Cecil never said so.

One day, before the two children were either of them quite restored to strength, they were sitting in the schoolroom playing a game of draughts together.

At a sudden movement Cecil's ankle gives him a twinge. He winces, and stoops to rub it.

Without any warning May gets up and throws her arms round her brother's neck.

"Cecil darling, you know I didn't mean it! I didn't really wish it. You know I didn't, don't you?" she says.

Cecil is not as a rule given to making demonstrations; but on this occasion he hugs May to him very tenderly, while tears—not her own—fall on May's cheek.

"May," he says, in a queer choky voice, "I was—a brute, and you are—an angel. There! don't let's have any more humbug! Do you hear?"

And then Cecil stoops down to pick up a draughtsman, which has fallen on the floor. •

"How these stupid things do tumble about, to be sure!" he observes gruffly.

As for May, she is not quite happy until, with her arms round her mother's neck, she has related all the experiences of her memorable visit to fairy-land, and its results—all, even to that last disastrous fulfillment of her hasty and much-repent-ed wish. It is very hard work telling *that*, but she does it with the feeling that even if her mamma is angry it

will be better to have made confession, and had it all out.

But mamma is not angry ; she only holds her little girl closer to her, and whispers, " Poor little May ! "

" I thought he was dead, you know, mamma ; and I did feel *so* dreadful ! "

Mamma shudders. " Yes, my darling. Now I can understand what made you ill, even more than the wet feet. "

" And so, mamma, " May says, after a pause, during which she has been thinking very deeply, " so after all, having one's own way doesn't seem to be the very happiest thing, does it ? "

" No, darling, though that is a lesson hard to learn—perhaps the very hardest in the whole world—and one that the wisest and best of us are only being taught, page by page. "

" Do you mean grown-up people, mamma ? "

" Yes, my child ; young and old have all their tasks to learn, believe me,—this among the number ; and until we do learn that there is something better, and

happier too, than having our own way, we are but dunces in God's school. Do you understand ? ”

“ I think so.” Then, after a little pause, “ Are you learning, mamma ? ”

“ I am trying, May.”

“ And I will try too, mamma,” says May, softly.

Just then papa pops his head into the room. “ What are you two talking about so solemnly ? ” he inquires.

“ About having one's own way,” mamma says, cheerily.

“ Really ! then I think I'll join the conversation ; I might pick up a hint, you know. My own way ! why, that's what I've been trying to get for the last fifteen years, ever since I knew you, mamma, and have never succeeded yet ! ”

“ But we've just been deciding that it is a very bad thing for people to have,” May says, demurely.

“ Especially for papas ! ” adds mamma.

And so papa thinks it wise to beat a retreat, and go after the grouse which are waiting for him in the covers.

But May, when she is alone, ponders the whole matter very deeply, and argues it out, as her fashion is. And this is at least one conclusion at which she arrives,—

“If, as mamma says, grown-up people don’t have their own way any more than little girls do, and if, supposing they did, it wouldn’t make them happy, why, I’d better be contented with being a little girl for the present.”

And considering that May stands some chance of being a little girl for several years to come, the conclusion is, we may think, a sensible one.

Then she turns to her journal, and writes a long account of it all—of her fairy adventures and birthday troubles. It makes quite a long book when all is told.

“And so, dear journal,” writes May in conclusion, “you see this happy, happiest day of mine turned out to be—well, anything but that ; and all because I had everything I wished for. Isn’t that queer? But you may be sure that I shall never, never, no never want to have my own way again.”

No, dear May !—not till next time !

PETER THE ROBIN.

I.

"A H ! that's right, wife : pile on some fresh logs, let's have a good merry blaze," said Max Handler, as he came in from the sawmills one November evening. "I tell you it's as cold a sun-down as we've had this side Christmas, and I shall be very much surprised if it doesn't snow before morning."

"Why, you do look cold, father," said young Max, the eldest hope of the house, as his father divested himself of his thick coat and hat, and hung both up on a peg behind the kitchen door ; "your cheeks are quite purple, and your nose is quite blue."

"Was ever such a child," said his mother, laughing, "for making remarks ?"

"The young scamp—I'll teach him to make remarks on me!" said his father, taking him up by the shoulders and turning him head over heels down his broad back. "Get up, you sir!" he went on, as the boy, after this slight exercise, clutched hold of his father's legs, and seemed anxious to repeat the experiment; "get up: you are growing too big for me to romp with,—and besides, I'm starving and famishing. Mother, isn't the supper ready?"

"Quite. Now then, Max, pull a chair up to the table for father, and come along."

On the table are set bowls of steaming milk and some sausage.

"That's right," says the father, sitting down in his carved arm-chair, and attacking the sausage at once. "But how's my little Hans? I don't believe he's spoken one word to his father, or given him a kiss to-night."

"Oh, Hans, haven't you?" says the mother.

Little Hans is just lifting a spoonful of bread and milk to his lips, but he drops the wooden spoon,

scrambles off his chair, and, going to his father, kisses him.

"Good evening, dear father," he says ; then he stops, and looks in his father's face very deliberately. "Max was not right," he says, after a moment's pause ; "your face is not purple, and your nose is not blue, father."

"That's a fine fellow !" says Max the elder, laughing, and almost choking himself over a great piece of sausage which he has just put into his mouth. "Don't let them say rude things of your father's nose. Now, if you were asked, what colour would you say it was, my son ?"

Hans hesitated.

"Speak up, speak up, my little one. When your father asks you a question, always answer directly. It is not blue, you say ; then what is it ?"

"I think it is red, father," said little Hans ; at which there was a general laugh.

"Father," said Max the younger, after a moment's pause, "do you *really* think it is going to snow ?"

"Indeed, that I do, Max."

Max clapped his hands. "Oh, how delightful!" he cried; "I do hope it is!"

II.

"Now then, boys, it is time for you to go to bed," said Mrs. Handler, as soon as supper was ended.

But before saying good-night, the two children must kneel in turn at her feet, and offer their simple prayer, Hans first, and then Max—during which proceeding the whole family kept reverential silence. They each said, first the Lord's Prayer, and then a prayer for father, mother, brother, aunt, and all kind friends. But to-night Max had yet another petition to offer.

"And please, God, make it snow before the morning," he said, quite solemnly.

"Max, why do you say that?" asked his mother, a little shocked.

"Because I want to show it to little Hans, mother. He hasn't seen it, you know—he's such a little fellow."

And as the two children went upstairs to the loft

where they slept, "I know it will come now, Hans," said Max, mysteriously, "because I have asked God. You will see."

"What?" said Hans.

"Oh, Hans! the snow: how stupid you are, to be sure!"

III.

Max's faith bore fruit.

The first thing that he did the next morning, when he woke, was to jump up and stand bolt upright in bed, for by so doing he could see out of window. He gave a little shriek of joy, and stirred Hans, who was peacefully sleeping beside him. "Wake up, wake up, Lazy-bones!" he cried; but Hans only gave a grunt, and turned over on the other side. Max applied his foot more vigorously. "Wake up, I say, can't you, Hans? It has come; I told you it would."

"Who has come?" asked sleepy Hans, rubbing his eyes.

"The snow. Do get up, and look out."

Little Hans tried the plan. "But I am so very cold, Max," he began, the corners of his mouth going down.

"Never mind the cold. You're surely not such a baby as to cry!"

"Oh no!" said Hans, with a little sob.

In a very few minutes the two boys found their way into the kitchen, where their father was already beginning his breakfast. "Why, bless thee, my little one!" he cried, as he gave Hans his morning kiss, "I think I can tell thee the colour of *thy* nose to-day. It is purple as the flowers of spring—a perfect little violet."

"Father, we have been looking at the snow," says Hans, rubbing his nose with a small fist, equally purple.

"And I can well believe the snow has been returning the compliment," said his father.

But no sooner was breakfast over than both the children clamoured to be allowed to go out.

"Yes, yes; let them," said the father. "They will run about and get warm."

IV.

Oh! what fun it was, racing along on the soft white velvet, making footprints where never a foot had trodden before!

How weird, and strange, and unfamiliar looked the familiar scene! Everywhere whiteness; just as though a mantle had fallen from the great white throne itself! A veil of purity over all the earth, and over every green thing growing upon it, and over every unsightly thing, turning them to beauty. And with the purity, silence, a reverential stillness, as though the unquiet world at length was hushed to rest.

"Isn't it lovely?" said Max. "Just like fairy-land."

"Is it?" asked Hans, solemnly; for, of course, by that, he thought that his brother had been there, and knew all about it. "But it's very cold—and white, isn't it?" he continued. Somehow the snow seemed to awe him.

"Yes, but you must run about, and make snow-

balls—so,” said Max, suiting the action to the word.

“Now, then, shall I pelt you, or a tree?”

“Oh! a tree, I think,” suggested Hans, timidly.

The shot missed the tree, but as the ball fell in fragments, it disturbed a family of sparrows which lived in one of the lower branches.

“Oh, the dear birds!” cried Hans; then, rather doubtfully, “Do they like the snow, do you think?”

“I don’t know. I am not quite sure. We will ask mother,” said Max.

“Mother” did not seem sure about it, either, when they asked her. “But I don’t think they can be quite comfortable in this bitter weather, poor little things!” she said. “Certainly they must be very hungry, for they cannot get at their usual food.”

“Oh!” said Hans, reproachfully, to his brother—
“you never thought about the dear birds when you asked God to send the snow; and now they will all die, because they have nothing to eat.”

“We will throw out some crumbs of bread to them every morning while the snow lasts,” said the mother. “They will like that.”

"Ah! yes, mother, do let us," cried both the children at once.

So every morning they used to go to the back door, that opened right upon the forest, and throw out each a handful of bread-crumbs to the poor starving birdies, whose little larders were all frozen over.

And after a day or two, the birds seemed quite to know what was coming, and to expect it. As soon as ever the back door was opened, down would flock the little pensioners from bough and branch, and make off each with a prize; and some, more bold than the rest, would hop upon the doorstep, and chirrup a blithe "thank you."

V.

One little fellow among them there was, to whom the children took a great fancy. He was the tamest and the prettiest bird of the whole company. He was a robin redbreast. He never missed a morning in coming; and when he had had his fill, instead of flying off, like most of the other birds, he would perch

on a low bramble that grew close to the door, and would sing a pretty little song before saying good-bye. The children nicknamed him Peter, and came, after a while, to consider him quite in the light of a friend.

The winter was very severe that year, and the snow lasted on the ground for weeks together. Certainly, it would have been a bad time for the forest birds if they had not had some one to look after them a little. Even as it was, it is to be feared some of them suffered a good deal.

One day, as the two little boys were running along under the big forest trees, that were so crusted over with icicles that they looked exactly as if they had been taken off the top of a twelfth-cake, they saw something which grieved them very much. It was a poor little frozen dead bird!

"Oh, Max," cried Hans, for he was the first to see it, "look at this poor, dear little dickie! Let us take him home and warm him,—he is so very cold."

Max took him up and looked at him. "That

would be no good at all," said Max, in his superior wisdom. "Don't you see he's dead?"

"Oh!" cried Hans, his eyes filling with tears, "I am so sorry—poor dickie!" and he stroked his feathers softly as he lay upon the ground.

"Let us cover him up with leaves, shall we?" suggested Max, by way of being actively benevolent. And when poor birdie's funeral rites were performed, the little boys returned home, somewhat saddened. There is something subduing and touching in the sight of death—even the death of a sparrow!

"I suppose it was the cold that killed him," said Max, as they walked on.

"I shouldn't like Peter to die like that," said Hans. "Only fancy if it had been Peter!"

"What's the good of fancying?" said Max. "It wasn't Peter. You'll see he'll come hopping along as gay as ever to-morrow morning."

"I shouldn't like Peter to die out there in the cold," repeated little Hans, meditatively.

"No," said Max. Then, after a moment's pause, "I tell you what, Hans: we'll bring him in to-morrow

morning, and keep him in the cage that the old thrush used to have. I'll ask mother to give it for him."

"But perhaps Peter wouldn't come," suggested practical Hans.

"As if we were going to ask him!" laughed Max. "We'll catch him."

"How, Max?" asked the younger boy. "Will you put salt on his tail? Father told me the other day that one could always catch the birds so."

"Father was laughing at you," said Max. "No, no, you shall see; and we will get Aunt Lisa to help us."

VI.

Aunt Lisa was taken into the children's confidence and lent herself as an accomplice to the scheme.

"You are quite sure you will take care of the bird and be kind to it, if you catch it?" she asked.

"Why, yes, indeed, Aunt Lisa: that is why I want to take it out of the cold snow, and give it warm, cosy home," answered Max.

On this understanding Aunt Lisa helped Max to make a trap. It was a sieve tilted up a little on one side with a stick, and a long piece of string attached. The sieve was placed just on the threshold of the back door.

The crumbs were scattered as usual, and were as usual quickly snapped up by the hungry little multitude. As usual, Peter stopped behind for his little chat and chirrup.

"Now then," said Aunt Lisa, "keep quite quiet. Hush, hush, Hans ! you must be as still as a mouse, or your friend will be frightened. Here, hide behind the big butt. Now then !"

Max went on his hands and knees, and crept stealthily a little nearer the half-open door. He held the end of the long string.

There was a pause of breathless silence. Just under the sieve were some very tempting crumbs, cunningly placed. The question was, would Peter venture to secure them ? If so, it was evident that his fate would be sealed. He hesitated ; he went up to the sieve and peeped under. "Now he is going," thought young

Max. But he didn't go just then. He hopped back again. Then he sat on the door-sill, and sang a the treasure which he had not the courage to lay beak on. Then once more he neared the tempting bait. Once more his courage failed him ; once more he persuaded himself that there was no cause for alarm and by the time he had become convinced that there was no danger at all—fell into the trap. He hopped under the sieve ; Max in a second pulled the string and jerked away the little piece of stick which kept the sieve up, and poor Peter was a prisoner.

The children bore off their prize in triumph—kindly triumph, too.

“ Mind you are gentle with him, poor little thing ! ” said Aunt Lisa.

But there was scarcely need of the warning, for neither Max nor Hans were of that horrible race of little monsters who delight in inflicting tortures on some weak, helpless thing that is in their power.

Certainly, Max handled him as gently as though he had been made of silver paper ; and in the thrush's cage, which was assigned him as his future

home, he was plentifully supplied with all manner of delicacies. - Every half-hour during the day the children would think of some fresh small bird-luxury, with which to charm their new pet.

VII.

But yet, in spite of all, poor little Peter moped and pined, and beat his crimson breast against the bars, and turned away disdainfully even from the choicest crumbs.

"Surely," said Max, with tears in his eyes at the ill success of his schemes, "surely he must be happier here, in a warm comfortable house with plenty to eat, and everybody being so kind to him, than he was starving out in the cold snow!"

This was on the second day of Peter's captivity, when the poor little bird was looking so deplorably draggle-tailed and wretched that no one could help feeling sorry for him.

"Well, I don't know Max," said his father. "You are, for instance, a poor woodcutter's son, and there are many fine things in this world that you have not

got, and which I cannot give you; but there is one very precious thing that you have, and that is *freedom*. So precious a thing is it, my boy, that without it a man's life is little worth. And I think if any powerful creature were to pounce upon you, and shut you up in a cage and keep you prisoner, that you would pine a bit for your rough home life, and for the old loving home voices, however smart clothes they might give you to wear, and however rare food they might give you to eat. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, father—but then," in a tone of great disappointment, "I did mean to be so kind to—to Peter."

"Well, well, my son, I am sure your intentions were good. But having tried to be kind to him in one way, to please yourself, suppose now you were to be kind to him in another, to please him."

"I know what father means," whispered little Hans; "he means—let us set him loose again."

"After I have had all the trouble of catching him, and when I thought he would get so fond of me," said Max, regretfully.

"Ah!" said his father, smiling, "that is so often the way with people who think they are being benefactors. After all, it is their own pleasure they consider rather than the happiness of those they benefit. However, my boy," he added, "I leave you to do as you think best. The bird is yours, and you can either keep him a poor little prisoner for your pleasure, or set him free for his own."

Max thought a minute. "Father," he said, "I will set him free. I should like him to be happy."

"There's my own boy!" said the elder Max, his eyes shining, as he laid his hands lovingly on his little son's shoulder. "'Tis but a trifle, my lad, but is a step in a good path—the path of self-devotion."

So Peter was after all set free. Max carried the cage to the outhouse door, and there with his own hand gave liberty to the little captive.

"Good-bye, dear Peter," said the child, a little sadly, as he opened the door of the cage; "I did mean to be kind to you, you know, but as——"

Peter did not wait to hear the end of the sentence, but spreading his wings to the frosty air, he soared

In consequence of this, visiting beyond a certain radius was really an impossibility to Hector.

The raven at length recognising this fact, and being somewhat of a gossip, resolved to waive ceremony, and, clad in his best black coat, made a morning call, at the most fashionable hour of the afternoon, upon Mr. Hector.

That gentleman received his guest with the greatest politeness, and the two conversed in the most amicable way.

The raven had evidently the intention of making himself agreeable.

"As neighbours, I think we should be acquainted," said he.

"I am sure I am charmed to see you," replied the dog; "and shall be at any time. For myself, you see, my duties really tie me so much to home that you must excuse me if I neglect to return your visit."

"Yes, yes," said the raven, in a melancholy tone. "I pity you with all my heart."

"Dear me! you need not do that," replied Hector, quickly. He did not very much care to think that

he was an object of pity to his visitor. "I don't know that I've anything to complain of."

"Oh, really!" returned the raven, lifting his feathers a little contemptuously. "If you are satisfied, there is nothing more to be said, of course. But I should have thought your life was a *very* sad one."

The raven looked so unhappy about it that Hector really began to think there must be something in what he said, especially as he had always heard that the raven was a very wise bird.

"Well, I don't know," said Hector, meditatively, "I've a very good house to live in, as you see; a good master, and pretty nearly everything that I want."

"Ah! of course," returned the raven, with a sickly smile, "if such a life suits you, far be it from me to make you discontented with your lot! But it does seem to me a melancholy thing that an animal of your intelligence should live in slavery—chained up night and day by the caprice of a cruel tyrant. It almost makes me weep to think of it."

"You must know," returned the dog, rather in-

dignantly, "that I occupy a position of trust and responsibility. My master places the greatest confidence in me. If it were not for me, he would never be able to close an eye in peace. But he knows that I am always keeping guard over his property and over his safety, and so he is able to live in happiness and contentment. He is, besides, by no means a tyrant, but one of the kindest masters possible."

"*Masters!* ay, that's it. You're nothing better than a slave, my poor Hector," croaked the raven—"a poor miserable captive, chained down to a prison-house. But, of course, if you like it, that's enough. Heaven forbid that I should put ideas into your head!" added the bird, turning up his eyes; "we have each of us our different walk in life. I daresay, after all, you have some compensations; but, for myself, give me liberty, freedom, the power of doing what I will, of going where I please——"

"Of being no good to anybody, in short," put in the dog, sarcastically.

"No, no, my good friend—do not say so," returned the raven; "I am at least able to offer sympathy to

those less fortunately placed than myself ; and while I spread my wings to the morning breezes, or swing myself to sleep in my leafy hammock, my heart will still be sighing for the fate of my poor friend, chained down in his solitary dungeon, wearing his coat away under the galling chain."

By the time the raven had come to the end of this sentence his emotion was such that his hoarseness quite overcame him.

The dog hardly knew whether to laugh or be angry.

"I'm sure you're very kind," he said, "to be so interested in other people's affairs. But, after all, I don't see that my fate is such a very hard one. I really think, sir, that you are disposed to take a melancholy view of things."

"Poor dear!" croaked the raven, still very hoarse. "I truly rejoice that you are able to take any other view from this dismal prison of yours."

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Raven," said Hector, provoked by the air of superiority which the bird assumed, "I believe you must be suffering from an

attack of indigestion. That last worm you swallowed has evidently stuck in your throat, and that is why you are so terribly in the blues ; or else you're in for a shocking cold,—your voice sounds like it. I don't believe leafy hammocks are good for your constitution. If you'll take my advice you'll keep your mouth shut, and not let the cold air get down your beak."

"What do you mean?" croaked the raven, very much offended. "I don't hear anything the matter with my voice."

"Well, well," returned the dog, slyly ; "Heaven forbid that I should put ideas into your head, or try to make you discontented with your fate!"

"With my voice, you mean," retorted the raven,—
"no, you would have some difficulty in doing that. It has always been considered a remarkably fine organ. By the way," he went on, "I must be off now, or I shall be late at a concert that is going to take place to-day in the elm avenue, at which I have promised to take the principal bass-solo. Good-bye, my friend, good-bye. What a pity it is you can't

come with me! *How* you would enjoy it, to be sure!" With this parting thrust, the raven stalked off.

"What a stupid, meddlesome, conceited, ridiculous bird, to be sure!" observed Hector, as soon as he was gone; "what nonsense he talked, too! It was as much as I could do to keep myself from flying at him, and punishing him for his impertinence. Only the cunning creature kept himself, I observed, just out of reach of my chain. Umph!—Ah! After all, that chain is rather a bore sometimes. Though there wasn't a word of truth, of course, in what that old Croaker said, still—still——"

In short, though Hector did not believe one word of what the raven had said, he began from that time to think that perhaps it would have been more pleasant if one or two things had been differently ordered in his life. He began to feel less proud of his handsome brass collar than he had formerly done; his house did not appear to him so convenient or comfortable; even the caresses of his master seemed to have lost their charm; and sometimes he

could not help fancying that his chain was growing shorter than it used to be.

He mentioned this circumstance one day to the raven, who still continued his friendly visits to his neighbour, in spite of the rather ungracious manner in which his attempts at sympathy had been received in the first instance. He was a bird of a patient disposition, and besides so firmly convinced of his own excellences that he felt sure he need only be known to be appreciated. In truth, it appeared to be so in this case, for the more Hector saw of the raven, the more he was persuaded to believe in his shrewdness and wisdom. It was evident, thought Hector, that he had seen a great deal of the world, and done a great many things that he, Hector, had not done, and it was plain that on many matters his opinion was valuable.

So he referred this affair of the chain to him.

"Do you think it possible," said he, "that it does grow shorter? After you have paid me a visit, and we have had one of our interesting conversations together, it always seems to me that it is rather tighter than it was before."

"Ah!" returned the sagacious bird, "I am not surprised to hear it. The fact is, your eyes are becoming wide open, and when that is so, chains always grow tighter and more painful."

"Dear me!" replied the dog, taking the raven's words literally. "In that case I will try to shut my eyes rather closer; but I had really no idea that I opened them any more than I have done since the time I was a puppy."

The raven smiled and nodded his head, and looked very wise indeed.

"When once folks' eyes are opened, it is very hard to shut them again," he remarked sententiously. "They go on widening and widening."

"No: do they really?" said Hector, rather alarmed. "But in that case, then, my chain will go on shortening and shortening. Don't you think it would be better for me to make up my mind to keep at least one eye shut, for fear of consequences?"

The raven shook his head. "There would be a better plan than that," said he.

"What is that?" asked Hector.

The raven came close to his friend and whispered something in his ear, but his voice was so croaky with emotion that Hector could not make out what he said.

"What do you say?" he inquired, very much puzzled. "'Bray again'? I don't understand. I'm not a donkey, sir, whatever you may think."

"You're a worse donkey than I took you for," said the raven, speaking louder. "Break your chain—break your chain! There: now do you understand?"

"Goodness me! of course. I'm not deaf; you needn't shout so," retorted Hector; "but in spite of all your wisdom I don't see why I should take all that trouble only to get myself into a scrape with my master, who would probably beat me, and buy me a new chain, which might not be so comfortable as the old one."

"Pshaw!" said the raven, as soon as he could speak for laughing. "Did ever anybody hear such a creature? What would your master have to do with you then? Don't you see that, your chain once broken, you would be free—free? Are you too

mean-spirited a cur to understand even the meaning of the word *liberty* ? ”

“ There’s no occasion to call me bad names, Master Raven,” said Hector, a little sulkily, “ though I’m sure I’m always willing to listen to your opinion, and to take your advice—when it’s good.”

“ It’s always good,” observed the raven, with an air of great conviction.

When people believe thoroughly in themselves they often succeed in making other people believe in them.

So it was in this case. The raven was eloquent. He loved to hear his own voice. He had a number of very fine phrases which he did not quite understand himself, and which the dog understood even less. But in the end, Hector became firmly impressed with the notion that he was a very ill-used and unhappy animal. In short, his eyes became so very wide open, as the raven would have said, that the whole pleasure of his life was gone. He grew completely discontented. He did not know in the least what he wanted. He had had no experience of any

life other than the one he led. But he was put thoroughly out of temper with that, by the raven's sophistries. He was always longing for something different from what he had, and, for want of a better name, he called this vague unknown something for which he longed, *Liberty*. It is a word that has to suffer a good many meanings as the world turns round!

At length, after many very serious and lengthy conversations, Hector, urged on by the raven, resolved that he would at the first opportunity escape from his bondage.

"Let us join company, my dear fellow," said the raven. "I know something of life. I will be your guide and friend."

"Indeed, you are most kind," said the dog, "and I feel deeply grateful. I confess I don't know much about the ways of the world outside my master's premises."

"No: how could you, you poor ill-treated creature?" responded the raven, sympathetically.

"The only thing," observed the dog, "is, that if I abandon my master, what will become of him?"

Who will guard him from danger, or his property from depredation? Who will keep beggars and tramps off his grounds? If I neglect all my duties, who will do them?"

"Pshaw,—duties!" returned the raven, quite impatiently. "Who ever heard of such things? It only shows what a slave you are, my poor Hector, to have such low ideas. If your *master*, as you call him, wants his property guarded, why, he can sit in the kennel himself—can't he?"

"Well, I suppose he could," said Hector, meditating. "It's a good idea, raven. I never thought of it before—only——"

"Nonsense *only*," replied the raven. "You just take my advice. Think about yourself, and don't trouble yourself about anybody else. That's my maxim, and you'll find it much the best way to get along. That's true liberty, that is."

"Ah!" said Hector, considerably impressed. "Is it really?"

The opportunity for which Hector sought was not long in coming.

One day Hector's master took him out for a walk, as he occasionally did. And very delightful these little excursions had always been to the dog. But latterly even they had lost their charm.

"What pleasure," the raven had said, "can there be in trotting here and there after a slow two-legged creature, who orders you about every moment, and expects you to 'keep to heel,' and 'fall in,' or perhaps even fetch and carry for him at the slightest word of command, just for his amusement?"

So on this particular day, instigated by the raven, who was hovering about, Hector resolved to give his master the slip.

He pretended, after a while, to be extremely busy poking his nose into a rabbit-hole he found in a field, through which he and the farmer passed.

He heard his master whistling and calling to him, now in one tone, now in another. Still he did not go.

He resisted, though it went rather against him to do so.

"Hector! Hector!"

Again the well-known whistle. The custom of obedience was almost too strong for the dog to be able to throw it off. He was just going to rush along in answer to the summons, when the raven, who had followed the pair, alighted close beside him, and whispered in his ear,—

“Are you going to lose your chance, you stupid? Do you want your chain to grow shorter than ever? Come with me, come with me. Run off in the other direction to your master’s call. Put distance between you and him. Come!”

So saying, the bird took flight, the whistling at the moment ceased, and Hector, in a tremor of mingled pleasure and pain, followed his tempter as fast as his four legs would go. After a while Hector began to get tired, and called on the raven to stop.

“No, no,” croaked he; “you must come on now. It’s no good stopping half-way on the road to liberty.”

“But where are we going?” gasped the dog.

“Who shall say?” returned the bird, with one of his wise looks. “It’s very hard to say where liberty will lead us.”

"I wish it might lead us to a good supper and a comfortable bed," thought Hector ; but he did not say so, for he was beginning to be rather afraid of the raven's sarcastic remarks. On they went—over fields and ditches, and through streams, and by dusty high roads. At least, this was Hector's way ; and many a roundabout path he had to take, and many a breathless scamper, to keep up with his winged companion, to whom stone walls were no barriers, and stony roads no grief.

At length, when daylight was fading, they came to a clump of trees.

"I shall roost here," said the raven.

"And what am I to do ?" asked the dog.

"What you like," returned his friend. "That's the beauty of it now ; don't you see you are free ?"

"Yes," said Hector ; "then I should like a nice bit of meat, and some straw for a bed."

"What nonsense !" returned the raven ; "find some insects, and then go to sleep under the tree, if you can't get up into the branches."

"No, I'm afraid I couldn't do that," said the dog,

ruefully ; "and I'm horribly hungry. I don't think a million of insects would do me much good."

"I see, after all, you're a coarse, low-minded creature," croaked the raven, as he prepared to go to sleep, leaving his companion to his own devices.

At length the dog, hungry though he was, was so overpowered with weariness, that he, too, curling himself on the damp earth, fell asleep.

Hector awoke in the morning to find himself still more hungry and quite as tired as he had been on the previous night. In fact, he was terribly footsore.

"What are we going to do now?" he asked the raven, who was already up and dressed, and breakfasting to his satisfaction, among the roots of the tree.

"What we like," returned the raven.

The dog looked so melancholy that the raven could not help laughing.

"You don't seem half to enjoy liberty as yet," he remarked.

"I should enjoy something to eat more," returned poor Hector.

"Think of your liberty," exclaimed the raven.

"I should be more inclined to think of it, if I'd had my breakfast," said Hector.

"Well, I tell you what," said the raven, soothingly: "we'll try and find a young lamb or a chicken, and we'll kill and eat it."

"Dear me! But that would be stealing, wouldn't it?" asked Hector, who had always been a dog of very good character. "I have been told that stealing is wrong."

"Except in the cause of liberty," put in the raven.

"Ah! I see," returned Hector, not unwilling to be convinced.

At length his scruples were all overcome. There was a farmyard not very far from the tree where the two friends had passed the night.

The raven said that he would go and reconnoitre.

It was yet very early morning, and the gates of the farmyard were closed fast.

Hector prowled gloomily round, his tail between his legs, while the raven hovered above the farmyard, seeking for prey.

To Hector, hungry, and waiting inactive, the time

seemed to pass very slowly. At length he could restrain his impatience no longer, and barked out rather loudly to his companion, to know what he was about. But the sound of his bark was as a trumpet-call to battle. At this challenge at the gate, all the sounds of farmyard life awoke—cocks crowed, geese cackled, dogs barked.

“Hold your tongue, you stupid!” croaked the raven. “You’re just spoiling everything. You’ll get me shot if you don’t take care. We’d better make off as hard as ever we can, now.”

Hector was so crestfallen with the consciousness of the blunder that he had committed, that he could only apologise very humbly to the raven, and follow as well as he was able, by land, the course which the sagacious bird took in the air. But he found the task even a harder one than he had done the day before. Hungry, thirsty, weary, his limbs stiff and aching, and his spirits woefully depressed, he plodded on, in an aimless, hopeless way.

“What is to be the end of it all?” he asked himself again and again.

He at length ventured to put the same question to his companion.

"The end? Oh! I don't know," remarked the raven, tranquilly. "Aren't you enjoying yourself?"

"Bless my heart, no!" cried our poor Hector, surprised out of his usual good manners; "I only wish I was back again at good Farmer Hodgett's."

"Contemptible creature," said the raven, looking down upon the dog, "to be yearning after your chains! I've no patience with you!"

"I'm yearning after my dinner more than anything else, at this moment," growled Hector.

"If you hadn't barked and made a foolish commotion, you'd have dined like a prince an hour ago," remarked the raven.

Hector, feeling the full force of the reproach, could only be silent.

"Perhaps now you have learnt wisdom, however," the bird went on: "I see another farmyard close by. If you'll only have a little confidence in me, all will, I have no doubt, go well."

Hector, with much humility, professed that he

would be guided in all things by the raven, and do exactly as he was told.

"That is well," said his mentor. "Then you lie quietly down by this haystack, and leave me to manage. If you will be docile and obedient, all will go smoothly."

Hector was so tired that he was not sorry in this matter to obey the raven; but he could not help thinking, as he stretched his limbs languidly on the grass,—

"After all, liberty seems very much the same to me as the other thing. It's only obeying one person instead of another, and not being half so comfortable."

As he had permission to rest, however, he availed himself of it by taking a nap. Whether he slept for a long or a short time he did not know, but when he awoke he discovered the raven at no very great distance from him, eagerly employed in picking the flesh off the bones of a small duckling, which he had managed to capture and kill.

Hector roused himself.

"Oh! splendid!" he cried, bounding up to his friend. "Now this is something like! But why didn't you wake me before? It—it really seems to me that you're eating every bit of the creature yourself. Do leave off, and let me have a turn."

"No, no," said the raven, pecking away as hard as ever he could. "Don't be impatient, and don't be unjust. I shall have finished in one minute. As soon as I have eaten all the flesh, you shall have all the bones. Can anything be fairer?"

Poor Hector gave a perfect howl of disappointment.

"What is the matter now?" cried the raven. "Aren't you satisfied yet, when I've just risked my life on purpose for you?"

"You might have left me a bit of the meat, then, I think," said Hector, almost with tears in his eyes, and with the water running out of his mouth.

"Greedy creature! A likely idea!" said the raven, as well as he could, with his beak full of duckling. "You wanted it all, did you? What heartless ingratitude! You know you like the bones quite as

well as the meat. And, besides, let me tell you, beggars mustn't be choosers. There, now you may finish the rest," he added, leaving a collection of well-cleaned bones, and a heap of feathers, for our hero's portion.

"So this is liberty, is it?" said our poor crestfallen Hector, as he set to work upon his unappetizing meal.

From that moment, he resolved in his secret soul that he would give the raven the slip, and return to his old allegiance. He would go back to Farmer Hodgett's.

But it is not always so easy to go back when once the path of duty has been left. And Hector found it to be the case.

His first object was to rid himself of his companion, for whom he had begun to entertain not only fear, but positive aversion.

This was not accomplished without some little difficulty; for the raven, although he affected to despise the dog, was not willing to relinquish the power which he had acquired over him. In some

the shop—without moving, flung his knife at the intruder.

It made a deep gash in Hector's shoulder. Howling with pain, wounded alike in body and spirit, he rushed through the streets.

A cry of "mad dog" was raised.

On went Hector, a crowd of idle urchins at his tail, who shouted and yelled and gathered fresh force from every alley and byway.

Bleeding, desperate, and, in truth, goaded almost to madness, our hero rushed into a cobbler's shop, the door of which was standing open, and found a haven of refuge, very much to the alarm of the cobbler, beneath his bench.

There he stood at bay—or rather lay—panting. A council of war was held by an excited little mob who swarmed into the cobbler's shop.

"Fetch him out."

"Drown him."

"Knock him on the head."

"Poison him."

These were the sentences passed against Hector.

The only question was, who was to put them into execution.

Every one urged his neighbour to the task, but no one seemed desirous of becoming the hero of the adventure.

At length, as good luck would have it, somebody's eyes strayed to a paper stuck up against the cobbler's wall, which ran thus :—

“Strayed since Tuesday last from Farmer Hodgett's, a brown rough-haired dog, terrier breed, answers to the name of Hector. Whoever will restore the same shall receive ten shillings reward.”

“Heigh !” cried the discoverer of this wonderful document. “Perhaps after all this may be no other than Farmer Hodgett's watch-dog. Here, Hector ! Hector !”

Whereupon Hector, hearing himself addressed mildly by name, crept forth from his hiding-place, and lying down upon the floor on his back, with his paws in the air, surrendered at discretion at the feet of his conquerors. Very shortly afterwards, he, to his intense satisfaction, found himself once more in

his old quarters. His master was the poorer by ten shillings, but all the richer in a servant who had bought his experience pretty dearly, and was not therefore likely to "stray" again.

With what feelings the wayworn dog once more took possession of his old dwelling ; with what emotion he witnessed the real delight with which his master welcomed him ; with what guilty feeling of self-reproach he listened to the tender pity which his miserable condition provoked ; with what appetite he ate the plentiful meal which was set before him ; —all this can be better imagined than described. Never was returning prodigal more truly penitent than was he. Never was a watch-dog who did his duty with more heartiness and spirit.

Time passed on.

Hector had seen nothing of the raven—that bird of evil counsel—since the day when he had taken the resolution of breaking free from his guidance. Summer had passed into autumn, and autumn had grown hoary and white. The early snows lay upon the ground thick and soft ; and Hector curled him—

self up on the rug inside his house, and laughed to think how snug he was.

Not much for him to do, either, on these bitter cold days ; for the tramps and beggars would scarcely venture to brave such weather, and the busy world's sounds were all hushed in the snowy stillness.

Hector lay peacefully thinking—not sleeping, but lost a little in reverie ; reflecting, perhaps, on his past errors and hairbreadth escapes.

Suddenly he pricked up his ears. A well-known sound had reached them. It was the voice of the raven—the raven, no longer the charmer.

“Delighted to find you once more, my dear friend,” he croaked out. “So distressed as I was at losing sight of you—I can’t tell you.”

The dog vouchsafed no reply. He only raised himself a little, and put his nose out of the kennel.

The raven came a little nearer. “My *dear* friend, how charmed I am to meet you, and looking so well too—in spite, poor fellow, of your misfortunes ! I see they have made you prisoner again.”

Still the dog did not reply. The raven went on.

"But no doubt every lot has its alleviations! What have we here?" looking towards a platter which lay beside the kennel. "Food! Ah!"

The raven's eyes looked hungry. The snow lay thick on the earth.

The dog showed his teeth a little grimly.

"Yes," he said, "I have just had my dinner. I owe you something, my friend. There are the *bones*; I am sorry I have not any feathers to offer you, but beggars mustn't be choosers, you know."

"What do you mean?" asked the raven.

"I mean," returned Hector, "to pay what I owe, as an honourable dog should. I owe you (besides the bones and feathers) some advice. Now the advice you gave me was very bad, and the advice I'm going to give you is good; so that, in fact, I'm being not so much just as generous."

"What is your advice, my friend?" asked the raven, blandly.

"I advise you," said the dog, solemnly, "to take



"I advise you," said the dog solemnly, "to take yurself off as fast as ever you can, if yu have any rag rd for your own bones, for feather."

yourself off as fast as ever you can, if you have any regard for your own bones—or feathers.”

The raven sighed and shook his head.

“Slavery has a very demoralizing effect on the mind and morals,” he said, “though far be it from me to make you discontented with the fate which——”

The dog interrupted him with a growl.

“No,” said he, “you won’t easily do that, my cunning old bird. You have taught me a very good lesson, for which I thank you. For the rest, I can dispense with your company. You had best take my advice, and make yourself scarce, for my chain is not, you will, I am sure, be glad to hear, by any means so short as it used to be. I have quite liberty enough to do my duty.”

“Well, well,” said the raven, making his best bow, “if that is so, I will take the liberty of wishing you good-morning.”

And being a wise bird, he went,—to air his liberty, bestow his advice, and seek his dinner elsewhere.

Hector watched him till he was well out of sight, and then once more rolled himself round on his warm

rug and went to sleep comfortably with one eye open, as is the manner of faithful watch-dogs.

“Let him laugh who wins,” he said, winking the eye which he kept open.

A GENIUS.

WHEN I was a little girl—a long while ago—I was found to have a quick ear and some little taste for music ; and my father, who was himself a great musician, determined that my taste should be cultivated, and that, to begin with, I should learn to play the violin, in the use of which he excelled, and which he pronounced to be the most perfect and sympathetic of instruments.

So, one New Year's Day, to my great delight, there arrived, directed to me, enclosed in many wrappings of paper, and tied about with strong cord in many tantalizing knots, a large, long parcel, which at first I almost hoped might be a cradle for my baby doll ; but which, when at length it was opened, I was

equally charmed to find was a beautiful little violin, lying snugly in a velvet-lined case!

The toy was but a toy to me. But I was at once eager to awake its slumbering music, and clapped my hands gleefully when my father told me that he himself intended to teach me how to unravel the sweet mysteries of the fiddle and bow. Nothing would content me but that I should begin at once. My father was equally excited on the subject, and it was arranged that there should be a lesson every morning before breakfast. But so many things in this world do not happen as we arrange them!

I can now scarcely remember which of us, the teacher or the taught, tired first; I have, at this distance of time, but a confused remembrance of tears on the one side and remonstrances on the other, and at length of sighs on both. But it is certain that, after a very short trial, the violin lessons were given up, and "the child" was pronounced to be "no genius." I know at the time I felt rather hurt at the tone of the remark, though I did not quite understand the meaning of the expression. I thought that

it referred exclusively to violin-playing, and created some confusion in the family circle by applying it to a distinguished author who was dining with my father some few evenings afterwards.

"You see, I know nothing of music," said the distinguished author, as he sipped his wine at dessert—addressing my father.

"Then Mr. M—— is 'no 'genius,' is he, mamma?" I asked in the loud whisper of an *enfant terrible*. Upon which, naturally, explanations had to be made on all sides; and I had to be informed that "genius" bears many forms and speaks with many voices.

It was some two or three years after this that I had the great pleasure of going, for the first time, to a really good concert. I remember how I sat by my mother's side, awed into unnatural stillness, and throbbing in every limb with suppressed excitement, as I listened to the thrilling war of sounds with which the concert opened. I drank in the concluding chords of the overture almost with a sigh of relief, so overpowering was the effect produced upon me.

"Why, little woman, what's the matter?" asked

my father, as he turned round suddenly upon me, and saw that my eyes were swimming in tears.

But I had no voice just then to answer him. I could only slip my hand within my mother's and sit quite quietly, thinking it all over, and wait almost painfully for what was to follow. As piece succeeded piece, however, my emotions naturally calmed, and my real enjoyment of the music increased in proportion. There were singers, I remember, two or three, and a gentleman with long hair, who played the piano with terrible energy; but the crowning feature of the performance, and that which more than anything else attracted and riveted me, was the playing of a certain violin-solo piece by a young girl.

At that time lady violinists were very much rarer than they are at the present day, and the enthusiasm which the performance elicited was, no doubt, in a measure attributable to this. At the same time, my father—who, as I have said, was a judge of these matters—pronounced the young *excutante* to be as talented as she was personally interesting, and joined

heartily in the rapturous applause with which she was recalled again and again.

For myself, I may truthfully say that, during the whole time, I was lifted completely out of myself and my surroundings. While the sweet sounds lasted, I was no longer an ordinary little girl, sitting on a somewhat hard bench, amidst a fashionable crowd of fanning ladies and sleepy men, but rather the happy occupant of some blest region, where thought was lost in emotion and life was made up of melody. And the habitants of my paradise were skilled musicians—adepts of the string and bow—like the angelic orchestras of the old pre-Raphaelite Italian painters.

I sighed at being brought back once more to earth—to the common-place incidents of hand-clapping and curtsies; and felt shocked and almost indignant at the criticisms which my father and mother and others ventured to pass, at the conclusion of the concert, on this and that.

But I was at least consoled to find that the arch-angel of my Elysium—the fair young violinist—was pronounced on all sides to be “a genius.”

"It is evident," said one, "that this is not the result of teaching: the girl is a genius."

"Yes, yes; she is born with it in her. It comes of itself," returned another.

"Mother," said I, a few days later, lifting my head from the puzzled contemplation of a rule-of-three sum, which obstinately refused to "prove" itself, and which was sorely testing my small stock of patience, "mother, how I wish I was a genius!"

"Why, my love?" asked my mother, looking up from her needlework with a smile.

"Oh, mamma," said I, sighing, as I gazed at the long, straggling row of figures to be gone over again, "it would be so—so very nice if it all came of itself, wouldn't it,—if it didn't give one any trouble?"

"Is that your notion of genius, dear?"

"Well, don't you know, mamma, what they said the other night about Mdlle. N——?"—I could scarcely name my divinity but with bated breath—"that it all came of itself, and that it was no trouble to her, and so on."

"I think 'they' must have made a little mistake, then, my dear, as 'they' so often do," returned my mother. "That genius is a Divine gift, I should be the last to deny. Surely my little girl knows that all talent, however humble, comes from the one great Source; but I am quite convinced of this—that no grand results in art, or anything else, were ever yet attained without a vast amount of honest hard work, of patience, self-denial, and often of suffering. We who see only the result are, as a rule, too apt to overlook this, and so lose the best half of the lesson that genius has to teach us. Often, too, it leads us to believe that because to us only one talent may be granted, we may be allowed to bury that—or cast it aside as useless. Yet we know, my dearest," said my mother, softly, "it is not so the Master would have us use His gifts."

"All the same," said I, after a pause, during which I had been thinking the matter over in my own mind,—“all the same, I should like to have been the servant to whom the ten talents were given; that must mean genius: don't you think so, mother dear?"

"Dearest," said my mother, "I think as you grow older, that you will be thankful that God has not so tried you."

"I don't think I quite know what you mean, mamma," said I, getting up and kneeling at my mother's side.

"Don't you remember, dear, that 'to whom much is given, of him shall much be required'?" said my mother, with the caressing movement of her hand upon my head which I loved. "Shall I tell you a secret?" she asked.

"Yes, mamma, do," said I, eagerly.

"Once upon a time, then, when I was young and foolish, I used to think that if ever God gave me a little child, I should wish him to be endowed with all the ten talents—to be great, or beautiful, or gifted above his fellows—a genius, in short."

"Him! mamma," said I, interrupting. "How could I be *him*?"

"Just so," said my mother, smiling, while a tear glistened in her bright eyes. "But now I have grown wiser, for I am able to thank Him every day for

giving me only a little every-day commonplace girl, who is not at all likely to set the Thames on fire—who is not dowered with any dangerously brilliant gifts—but who, I trust, will all the same do her best to use the little talent that has been granted her.”

“Yes, mother dear,” said I. “I think I understand you. Perhaps, after all, it was better that I should be ‘no genius.’”

MISS CAPRICCIA'S FAVOURITES.

I.

“OH you dear, sweet little pet!” said Miss Capriccia to the new arrival, as he rolled like a ball of soft white wool out of the basket in which he had made his first journey and his first step in life.

Miss Capriccia took the fluffy white ball up in her arms and caressed it.

“You certainly are a beauty, and such a bright, — intelligent little creature! I am sure you will be — clever, and do all sorts of tricks; I shall be so fond — of you.”

Then, turning to her old black-and-tan terrier —, who seemed also anxious to inspect the new comer, —

"Now go away, do, Dandy! I shan't care one bit for you any more. You're so stupid! Just like a hard pincushion stuffed with sawdust. That's what you are! I shall give you away to my aunt."

Certainly, whether Dandy really was as uninteresting as a hard pincushion or not, he could not presume to the intelligence and spirit of the new pet, Muff. Muff had the most comical ways. He would not only beg and "give a paw," but he would die for the Queen at command, like the most gallant of Her Majesty's soldiers. He would also show his appreciation of beauty, by turning round three times for the Princess of Wales. He would walk across the room on his hind-legs, and carry his mistress her fan, and when he was told he was naughty, he would stand up in the corner with his face to the wall. All these tricks Miss Capriccia herself taught him, with much patience and trouble, though certainly Muff proved himself to be a very apt and willing pupil.

"Never was such a dear little dog in the world," Miss Capriccia would say; until one day, one unfor-

tunate day for Muff, some one gave Miss Capriccia a new pet—a little canary in a pretty gilt cage.

Then in a moment all the young lady's interest and affections went over to the new excitement. No more carressing then for Muff; no more compliments on his sagacity and intelligence; but instead, "Go down, Muff; what a tiresome, disagreeable, scratching little dog you are, to be sure! Don't tease so."

"Lie down this instant, or I'll turn you out of the room," said the lady one day. "I want to talk to my birdie—my pretty, pretty Dick;" and as she spoke Miss Capriccia put her head first to one side and then to the other, and smiled at the little canary, who was at the moment perching on her finger, and chirping merrily away as he spread his glossy yellow wings.

The canary was a very pretty little canary indeed. But the whole affair seemed very hard to Muff, who quite forgot how he in his turn had ousted poor "Pincushion" Dandy from his mistress's favour, and made that unhappy dog's life so wretched that at

last, out of compassion, Miss Capriccia had really fulfilled her threat of sending him away as a present to one of her relations.

Muff had forgotten all about that. Perhaps he had never quite entered, if the truth must be told, into "Pincushion" Dandy's feelings. Perhaps he quieted his conscience by trying to believe that Dandy's heart, too, was only made of sawdust, or some such unfeeling stuff. However that may be, he had been from the first moment of his roll out of the basket a curly-coated puppy, his mistress's prime and only favourite, and it was not to be supposed that he would relinquish his position without a protest.

He did not see any particular reason why he should be discarded. Nobody had ever, that he knew, ventured to call him a pincushion. He was not aware that his name of Muff had any second meaning attached to it. If he had, he would have felt quite sure that the epithet was in no way applicable to him.

It certainly was hard upon him to find himself all at once neglected, and to see his rival petted and caressed before his very nose.

So, in spite of his mistress's scoldings, he continued to stand on his hind-legs and to pat her dress with his fore-paws, and to wag his bushy little tail, and to open his mouth and show his rows of pretty white teeth and his red curly little tongue—trying by every means in his power to attract his mistress's attention, and ending at last by a long pitiful growl and a short shrill bark.

This drew vengeance down upon him.

"Oh, naughty dog!" said the lady; "you're frightening my pretty birdie here. What a shame! And—dear me! how you are scratching and spoiling my dress!"

And with that she administered a little sharp pat on the top of poor Muff's woolly pate, which, though it certainly hurt his feelings more than his head, was not, to say the least of it, encouraging.

At last, Muff, finding all his little arts in vain, retreated dismally under the sofa, and tried to sleep his sorrow away.

But, unfortunately, he found that when he woke up again his sorrow woke too.

At any rate, there was the canary, and singing away as loudly as if he had a throat in every one of his feathers.

Poor Muff sighed. If he could only have slept the canary away, now, it would have been some satisfaction to him !

As it was, Muff had to wake to stern facts, as they were *with* canaries, and not as they might be without them.

Muff's reign was over. The longer he lived and the wider awake he got, the more surely and sadly was he convinced of this fact ; and all that he could do now was to retreat from his position as gracefully as he could.

He had not, unfortunately for himself, a taste for music, and the anguish which he now suffered from Master Dick's vocal talent was really beyond belief. At times, indeed, he found it quite impossible to refrain from relieving his feelings by a prolonged howl, or a hysterical spasmodic bark ; but as such expression of his sentiments met with strong disapproval from his mistress, and drew down upon him condign punishment, he put a violent force upon

himself, and, smothering his misery as well as he could endured in silence.

One method alone he had of requiting himself for the civility with which he was compelled to treat the new favourite, and that was, by chasing all the other birds he met with in his walks abroad. It need scarcely be said that the vengeance was very harmless since it amused Muff, and he never caught the birds.

Meanwhile Dicky, making rapid strides in Miss Capriccia's favour, made also rapid progress in his education. All the young lady's spare moments were devoted to his instruction. Not only did he hop on her finger at command, and eat from her lips, but he hopped through a little hoop which she held for him, lay down in her hand, and closed his pretty bright eyes when ordered to do so, and imitated his mistress's voice to perfection when she called "Sweet bird" or "Pretty Dick."

Indeed, there is no knowing to what wonders Dick might not have attained under the constant care and watchfulness of his fair instructress, had she not suddenly grown tired of the task of teaching him.

The reason of this was that a new pet had been presented to her. And before the charms of the Persian kitten poor Dick's attractions faded quite away.

Not a word or a caress had Miss Capriccia now for any one but Juliet.

Her kittenish gambols, her pretty laughable ways, her gracefulness, her beauty, her absurdity,—these were in turn the sole themes of her mistress's conversation. As for Muff, it is impossible to say with what feelings he regarded the new comer. He had considered the bird an intruder; he had been woefully hurt and offended at his advent; but what was a canary to a—cat? If the one was an outrage and an insult, what was the other?

His indignation knew no bounds when he discovered the fact that his mistress actually expected him to fraternize with the interloper, desired him to permit her to lie by his side on the hearthrug, and even proposed—monstrous absurdity—that they should eat out of the same plate.

“No dog of any spirit could stand it,” Muff said to

himself. Even a worm when trodden on will turn : so will the most long-suffering of dogs, when oppressed by—cats.

Muff did turn. First he tried *turning* upon the kitten, but as his mistress would by no means permit this, but protected the new pet with all the weight of her authority, Muff had no resource but to turn himself. And it is on record, that for the first week after Juliet's arrival and reception into favour, Muff lived in a far corner of the sitting-room, with his face turned to the wall.

But even from this retreat he was at length ruthlessly dragged by the remorseless kitten, who insisted upon springing at him at all sorts of odd moments, climbing his back, or making a plaything of his tail.

Muff even felt some sort of friendly compassion now for poor Dick, left unnoticed and melancholy in his little gilt prison. Were they not both in the same case? And though at first it was impossible for Muff not to rejoice a little at the discomfiture of his rival, the new state of things was so much worse in Muff's opinion that, after a while, all his resentment against



Each day, to her mistress's intense delight, Polly acquired some new word or other.

the canary died out, and was succeeded by a feeling almost amounting to attachment. At least they had one great bond of sympathy—a bond that has often united those most widely opposed—a mutual hatred.

If Muff disliked Juliet, and in a measure feared her, he certainly could not dislike or fear her to such an extent as did Dick. The very sight of her ruffled him out of all equanimity.

The dog and the bird exchanged confidences on the subject, Dickie telling all his griefs to Muff one day, when they were alone together, in a plaintive carol that quite touched Muff's heart.

The canary's singing did not now produce its old irritating effect upon Muff's nerves. Possibly Dick's songs were more subdued than they had been in the heyday of his youth and the growth of his power. Certainly Muff thought that his voice had become much sweeter than it used to be. Perhaps it was that Muff's musical tastes had developed. At any rate, it was certain that, as time went on, and the kitten became really more and more outrageous in her conduct, the two discarded pets set up a compact

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of mutual condolence and friendship. Muff would even choose as his favourite resting-place an arm-chair which stood close under Dickie's cage, and there the two would carry on quite long conversations, for by this time they had come to have a most complete understanding of one another's dialects.

"I'm frightened to death at that horrible kitten," moaned poor Dick one day, in his most plaintive tones.

"I don't wonder at it, my poor friend," returned the dog. "She's a mischievous beast, and will be the death of some of us before she's done, I feel sure ; but she shan't hurt you, if I can prevent it."

And Muff was as good as his word ; for one day when he and Juliet were by some chance left together alone in the room where Dick was hanging in his cage, Juliet made a playful dash at the cage, and would certainly have made an end then and there of Dick, had not Muff, suddenly awakening from sleep, rushed barking at her and frightened her from her purpose.

Miss Capriccia came into the room at the moment

"What is the matter? What is that stupid Muff barking about?" she said.

Then, observing the kitten with her back very much up and her eyes glistening, "Oh! you've been teasing Juliet, have you, you naughty dog? You'd better not let me catch you at it again," she said, taking the ruffled darling up in her arms, and soothing her with a dozen endearments.

"Oh!" chirped the bird, as soon as his mistress and the cat were out of the room, "how can I thank you enough, you dear kind Muff, for having saved me from the jaws of that terrible creature? I really thought I was gone. How could you venture to attack her so bravely?"

"As for that, I rather enjoyed it—so don't thank me," said the dog, growling pleasantly.

"But isn't it terrible to think of our mistress's cruel injustice?" sang the canary in recitative. "It is monstrous. No one can do right now except that cat!"

"Oh!" returned Muff, grimly, "those who live longest will, I expect, see most. Her turn will come."

II.

JULIET, however, managed to hold her own for a considerable period.

She was, Miss Capriccia would often assert, "the ~~most~~ very sweetest, prettiest, pussy-cat-darling that eve ~~er~~ was seen."

She certainly had a great many funny amusing ~~ways~~ ways with her. She would play with a ball as gai ~~ly~~ and dexterously as any child could have done, thro ~~w~~ing it in the air and catching it again, in the pretti ~~est~~est manner possible. She would walk among all ~~the~~ china and glass ornaments on the drawing-room cabinets, without disarranging a single thing. ~~She~~ had other amusements not quite so innocent. ~~For~~ instance, she would climb to the top of Miss Capriccia's pet India-rubber plant, and, by way of a joke, scratch off two or three of the choicest leaves; or she would have a delicious gambol among the cottons and silks of her mistress's overturned work-basket.

But all these crimes were somehow forgiven her,

for the sake of her engaging manners and bright eyes.

See what a thing it is to have engaging manners, not to mention the eyes !

But in the end Muff's prophecy came true. Pussy's turn did come. And she owed her downfall to a grey Parrot—whose attractions certainly no one could deny. There was no doubt about it : she was a very handsome bird ; and took good care that no one should forget the fact, by always speaking of herself as " Pretty Poll."

Polly had one great advantage over her predecessors in being able to use the vulgar tongue, and very apt she was in taking in new ideas and learning to say fresh sentences. Each day, to her mistress's intense delight, she acquired some new word or other. In fact, in time she seemed able quite to carry on a conversation, giving the correct answers to all questions put to her.

It need hardly be said that the new pet was a sore trial and annoyance to the rest of this happy family. Indeed, each member of it felt specially aggrieved on

Juliet, the latest favourite, of course felt very bitter on the subject of her rival, and it seemed also particularly hard to her that she should be supplanted by one of the feathered tribe—her sworn foes and natural prey. Not that there was any fear of the parrot, under any circumstances, becoming her prey. Guarded as the bird was with her sharp beak and strong wings, she was well able to hold her own against any number of cats. At the same time, the annoyance was none the less to Juliet.

Dickie's special aversion to the parrot had its rise in quite other reasons. He felt indignant that the new pet should be of the same race as himself. Certainly the world did not seem large enough to Dick to hold two birds, whatever other animals might find room for themselves upon it. He could partially understand that if his mistress wanted a cat-pet or a dog-pet he was not in a position to fulfil the requirement; but, if she wanted a bird-pet, wasn't he there himself? A bird, too, who could sing, a bird who could talk, much more sweetly than the parrot; a prettier bird, a bird in every way so superior to his

rival, that he could only feel astonished and disgusted with the bad taste which led Miss Capriccia to waste a thought upon so ordinary a creature.

“ Having known me, to decline
On a range of lower feelings,
And a harsher voice than mine,”

thought the canary. It was too cruel !

Muff had also his own particular reasons for objecting to the parrot, though he could not in his secret soul refrain from a little rejoicing at the downfall of his enemy, Miss Pussy, and the fulfilment of his own prophecy.

But the parrot was particularly irritating in this way—that she added insult to injury. For instance, she would call Muff by name in the very tone in which his mistress was accustomed to address him ; and then when Muff, full of hope and expectation, scampered cheerfully up to the spot from whence the voice came, Polly would burst out laughing, and Muff had to retreat discomfited, his tail between his legs.

Not only this. The parrot was actually given to making slighting observations on her predecessors in

her mistress's regards—a practice in which, sad to say, Miss Capriccia encouraged her.

“It was the most amusing thing in the world,” that young lady would say, “to hear Polly abusing the other animals. She did it so exactly as if she meant it.”

And so of course she did.

“What a muff! what a muff! what a muff!” she would say to the dog; and, “Hold your tongue, stupid Dick,” to the canary; while to Juliet, the cat, her observations were even more pointed. “Be off! get along! Who cares for you?” was her favourite manner of addressing that unhappy animal.

Polly was so particularly spiteful to Pussy that even Muff relented towards her, and made advances of friendship.

“Certainly,” he would say to the canary, “Juliet has improved very much lately. She is becoming quite ladylike and well-mannered.”

The fact of course being, that she was growing out of kittenhood into cathood,—between which states there is a vast difference.

Muff appreciated the change, whatever anybody else did. He was a dog of strong feeling, but not vindictive or revengeful ; and as time went on, and Pussy's manners continued to improve, he quite forgave her the sins of her youth, and admitted her to his friendship, and to the hearthrug, on almost equal terms. Occasionally he would even allow her to eat off the same plate with himself ; but it must be confessed that on these occasions he took the lion's share of the dainties provided, pretty nearly clearing the plate while Juliet was purring over one tiny morsel. But Juliet bore this very patiently. She became very much attached to Muff, and evidently considered herself honoured by his friendship.

After all, Muff was forced to admit, in spite of her early offences, Juliet was an animal of discernment. For after those kittenish days she always showed him great respect, and seemed immensely grateful for the condescending kindness with which he treated her. Adversity, and the withdrawal of her mistress's affections, certainly seemed to produce a good effect on Juliet's character. Her conduct even to Dickie

became quite exemplary. Instead of making dashes at his cage, and eyeing him with a proud and defiant air, as she had once done, she would now lie curled up on a chair close by him, for hours, quietly listening to his singing.

In short, the three animals, the dog, the cat, and the bird, formed what might be called a triple alliance. The parrot was their one object of united hatred, but in their conversations together they would often speak confidently of the time when even that proud creature's fall would come.

It came almost sooner than any of them expected.

For some days Polly had sat drooping, deserted, and silent.

Then at last, feeling sadly in want of a confidant, she unburthened her grief, for the benefit of whoever might hear. "Poor Polly! Poor Polly! Poor Polly!" she said, in such a miserable tone, that Muff, who was lying curled up beside Juliet on the hearthrug, was attracted.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Miss Capriccia has got a new pet," said the parrot, dolefully.

Muff roused himself ; so did Juliet. Dickie began pluming his wings, and making small observations to himself, as he picked up his seeds.

"What, already ? No, you can't mean it," said the cat.

"It's true, though," sighed Polly ; "I've suspected it for the last week. Miss Capriccia has hardly had a word to say to me for days."

"Dear me!" said Muff, a little sneeringly, "I'm sure we're all extremely sorry for your ladyship ! And pray, who is the new pet ?"

"Oh !" said the parrot, "that's the worst of all. I've been supplanted by such a horrid creature !"

At this the dog, the cat, and the canary all coughed ; and yet each felt some sympathy for the parrot, for they had each gone through much the same experience.

"Such a frightful animal !" said the parrot.

"Really !" observed the dog. "You have seen it, then ?"

"Yes, alas ! I've seen Miss Capriccia walking about the garden with it. It was with her there yesterday ;

the window was open, and I actually heard her calling it *dearest*; and once—you'll hardly believe it—she kissed it, or it kissed her, or something of the kind. Such a hideous creature, too!"

"Dear me!" said the cat, "it isn't a mouse or rat; is it? Because, if so, my friends," looking round at the company generally, "I might avenge our mutual wrongs."

"Oh no!" said the parrot, "it's not half such an innocent animal as that. It's a tall two-legged thing."

"Not a bird, I hope?" put in the canary, anxiously.

"No, I think not, though I did hear it singing the other day—whistling, though, I think it was—and when it whistled, our mistress ran to it directly."

"Is it a monkey, do you think?" suggested the dog. "But, by-the-bye, I don't think monkeys do sing, now I come to think of it."

"Its face is nearly all covered over with ugly black hair," said the parrot; "and its plumage was black, I think, or nearly so."

"Quick, quick! look!" chirped the canary from his

post of vantage ; "there's our mistress now, walking across the garden with something or somebody. Is that the new pet, Polly?"

The parrot craned her neck, the dog and the cat stood on their hind-legs at the window, to observe.

"Yes, yes—there they are!" shrieked the parrot in a fury, as soon as she caught sight of the pair. "Did you ever, in all your lives, see such a frightful monster of a pet as that? Miss Capriccia must be out of her senses."

Muff and Juliet being on a lower level, could not yet see. Muff, wild with excitement, stood still on his hind-legs at the window, wagging his tail and barking.

Presently Miss Capriccia and the new favourite came within range. Then all of a sudden Muff burst out laughing.

"Why, Polly," said he, "what a goose you are! it's nothing but a man!"

"You're a muff," said Polly, put very much out of temper. She did not at all like being called a goose. Who does?

Come, Richard," said Miss Capriccia, smothering her laughter. "She doesn't mean *you*, you know."

"Oh, doesn't she?" said the gentleman, mollified, as he followed the lady from the room. "I thought she did."

"What, did the cap fit so well?" laughed Miss Capriccia.

Miss Capriccia and her lover very nearly quarrelled over the parrot. But it was only very soon over and not quite. In the end the new favourite won the day.

"He is an ugly fellow, after all," grumbled the dog when the pair had left the room, for they had forgotten to take him for a walk, as he had hoped they would. "You were quite right, Polly,—a frightful creature. And yet it is evident that our mistress cares nothing else."

"Yes, yes," said the parrot, dismally.

"One comfort is," the dog went on, "that she will come. Miss Capriccia will get tired of her as she has done of all the rest of us."

"Of course," said the cat, a little surprised.

"What could Miss Capriccia be but *capricci*?"

At this joke all the animals laughed loudly.

But the fact was, that Miss Capriccia very soon changed her name, and, as Mrs. Richard Tomkins, became one of the most constant women under the sun.

A HEROINE.

"TROT," said my father to me one day, when I was a little girl; "would you like to go ~~for~~ a walk?"

"With you? Oh yes, papa."

"Well, then, make haste and put on your things."

"All right. Where are we going, papa?"

"We will go and make a call."

"A call! Oh, then you *must* wait while I change my frock; but I'll be as quick as quick."

"Never mind your frock; that will do," said my father.

"Will it? But I suppose I'd better put on my new hat—my hat with the white feather—hadn't I, papa?"

"No," returned my father, smiling a little as he saw my look of disappointment. "We shan't even want the hat with the white feather."

I certainly was rather fond of that feather. However, though that happiness was denied me, I ran upstairs brightly enough to fetch my old hat and gloves; for a walk with my father was always an intense pleasure to me. It was so nice to be his chosen sole companion, even for an hour; and I enjoyed having him all to myself.

As I came downstairs I put my head into the nursery, where my mother was with baby, and called out, "Good-bye,—I'm going for a walk with papa," and then ran off to join my father, who was already waiting for me in the garden.

I trotted along gaily at his side, chatting of many things; literally trotted, for it was impossible otherwise to keep pace with my father's long strides. And, in very truth, walking with him, though a proud and happy thing, was not altogether as comfortable as it might have been. Of course, I would not have admitted that such was the case for the

world, nor had my father the slightest notion of it — He was certainly one of the most unselfish men have ever known, and would not willingly have inconvenienced any one; but even to the most unselfish of the male sex it is not given to be over-thoughtful of little things.

But this is a digression.

We made our way merrily along the pleasant lane gay in their new spring dress; the air, as it met laden with the odour of the flowering trees and the songs of birds.

After a while, "Papa," said I, "you told me we were going to pay a call. Who are we going to see?"

"We are going to see a heroine, my dear."

"A *heroine*!" cried I in delight, clasping my hands about my father's arm. "No, papa—you don't mean it! A *heroine*! Why, I never saw a real live heroine in all my life! How charming!"

"My dear Trot," said my father, laughing, "you talk of a heroine as if she were some curious bird or beast. You remind me of the inscriptions outside

the Swiss châteaux, 'Would you wish to see a live chamois?'"

"Oh, papa!" said I, for I was not fond of being laughed at, "but I am sure heroines are much more uncommon than chamois: now, aren't they?" I added, recovering my good-humour.

"Well, I don't quite know about that, Trot; but I heard you saying the other day how much you would like to know a real heroine, so I thought I would introduce you to one."

"You dear, kind father!" said I. "But now tell me: Does she live in a castle, or a moated grange with—— But I don't think she can," I added, interrupting myself, "because there isn't one anywhere about here. Dear, dear! that's a pity."

"No, she doesn't live in a moated grange," said my father, smiling a little, "but I don't know that it's a pity, because those moats were nasty, stagnant sort of things, and might have given our heroine the rheumatism, if not the ague."

"Oh, papa! But think how picturesque, how pretty

"My dear," said papa, looking at me, "what's the use of being pretty, unless you're good for something too?"

"Oh, papa!" said I again. He was in what I called one of his teasing moods this morning. "Well, but about this heroine,—do tell me something more. What has she done, and where does she live, and what is she like?"

"How many more questions do you expect me to answer all at once, Trot? You are a sort of walking note of interrogation. Do you know what a very clever man once said that was?—'A little crooked thing that asks questions.'"

"Anyhow, I'm not crooked, so that doesn't apply," said I, tossing my head in a very dignified manner.

"I thought perhaps it might—to your temper, my dear," retorted my father, with one of his mock-solemn faces.

"Naughty, unkind papa!" said I, giving his arm a little shake. "I declare I won't come out walking with you any more, if you're going to be so unpleasant."

"Not even to see a heroine?"

"Oh dear, yes! the heroine! I'd quite forgotten about her. Now do let us make it up and be friends again, and do tell me all about her, will you, there's a dear darling of a father?" said I.

"All in good time, little woman," said papa, putting his arm round me, and giving me a gentle squeeze. "But see, here we are at Betsy Lane's cottage. I'm just going in to see her."

"Oh," said I, rather in a tone of disappointment. Not that I had any objection personally to Betsy Lane: she was rather a nice old woman, I thought. But I was naturally anxious to see my promised heroine, and looked upon poor Betsy this morning in the light of an interruption and an obstacle.

Betsy had been my father's nurse when he was a little boy, and I knew that he had a great respect for her. She was now quite an old woman, with scarcely a tooth in her head.

The cottage door was standing open, so we walked in. There was Betsy, in her old arm-chair, at her needlework as usual,—at least, when we went in she

was just in the act of threading, or trying to thread, her needle,—and very comical she looked, I thought, with her spectacles stuck on the tip of her nose, and her needle held up almost on a level with it. She was so engrossed that she had not heard us coming up the little garden.

“Why, Betsy,” said my father, in his kind, cheery voice, “you want a helping hand there, don’t you? Here’s missie come just in time to do that for you.”

Betsy started.

“Bless me, Master William, is that you?” said the old woman.

She always spoke to my father as if he had still been a little boy. She bustled about in a pleased kind of fuss to get us chairs.

“Well, now, this is nice. And it is but half an hour ago I was thinking of you, Master William.”

“That’s curious, too. But I have heard of such cases occurring before, Betsy. Don’t you know the proverb, ‘Talk of——’?”

“Tush, tush, Master William! that’s just like one of your queer sayings,” put in the old woman, laughing

and wagging her head ; " but there ain't no connection, I'm sure, in any way, between——"

" Well, well, Betsy, we'll hope not in this case," interrupted my father, laughing in his turn.

Meantime I was threading old Betsy's needle for her, and rummaging in her workbox for one or two more, so that she might have a supply ready.

" Thank you, my dearie," said the old woman, laying her hand on my back. " You're a sort of eyes to the blind, ain't you ? Not that I ought to be ungrateful enough to call myself blind though, Master William," she went on, turning to my father. " It's wonderful the way I see with them glasses that your good lady brought me,"—taking them off the table, where she had laid them while talking—" wonderful ! And grateful indeed I am for the sight that God has given me."

" You still make good use of it, I see, Betsy," said my father, looking at a pile of needlework that was heaped upon the table.

" Why, yes, my dear ; I'm thankful to say I'm never wanting work—what with your good lady, and the

Squire's lady, and one and another—never! It's perfectly wonderful!"

This was a favourite expression of old Betsy's: so much so that she was known in the village by the nickname of "Wonderful."

"Well, and how's Sam?" asked my father. "No more fits, I hope—at least, of course not, or you'd have sent for me."

"Ah! thank you kindly, Master William. No, he's just been as well as possible since that last attack, and as cheerful and happy, dear boy! He's out now, in the backyard, chopping wood. I'll just call him. He's always busy about something, and amusing himself, and so useful to me too. It's really wonderful."

"Don't trouble to call him, then, if he's all right," said my father, somewhat to my relief, for the person in question, known as Silly Sam, a nephew of Betsy's, was a poor half-witted creature, of whom I always felt rather frightened, although I believe he was perfectly harmless, and therefore it was very foolish of me.

"He's only an innocent, poor dear," the village people would say compassionately.

As for old Betsy, it scarcely seemed that she was aware of her nephew's misfortune. She never treated him or spoke to him with anything like pity. Although he was, in truth, a man more than thirty years of age, to her he was still the child he had always been, as interesting and engaging; and as such she petted and spoiled him, and related his funny sayings and doings with the same tender pride, with which a mother delights in the dawning intelligence of her infant. Poor old Betsy! It was indeed *wonderful*.

Then my father began asking after all Betsy's other charges, for she had been a kind of mother to a whole family of nephews and nieces. One nephew was at sea, one niece in service, another married, with two or three children of her own. About each one Betsy had a great deal to say. She loved having a gossip with my father, asking his advice on this point and that.

This morning, it seemed to me, being impatient to get away, she was in a specially loquacious mood, and I felt almost angry with my father for the pleased interest with which he listened to all the details of

Jenny's severe illness, and Mary Anne's difficulties with her employers ; and indeed when Sailor Jim's last letter, of ever so many pages long, was produced for my father to read, I fell quite into a state of despair.

I cast an appealing glance at papa, but he didn't seem to see it, and went on as calmly reading the letter, with a running commentary too, as if there had never been such a thing in the world as a heroine in prospect. The letter was really rather an interesting one, telling a great deal about China, where Jim's ship just then was, and I think if my mind had not been so full of my heroine, I should have enjoyed it. As it was, I was sitting all the while on thorns.

However, letters, even when they are two sheets and a half long, do come to an end at last ; and when it was read my father folded it up, gave it back to old Betsy, and to my great relief, rose to go.

"And now, papa," said I, as soon as our adieus were paid, and we were once more out of the cottage.

"What, my little girl ?"

"Where are we going now ?" I asked, a little impatiently.



"Why, home, I think," said my father.

"*Home?* Oh, papa!"—very reproachfully. "You surely can't have forgotten——"

"What, my dear?"

"The heroine, papa, that you were going to take me to see. The heroine, you know," I repeated very forcibly, thinking that papa must be really taking a day-nap.

"Well, my dear, we've been to see her; we *have* seen her," said my father.

"Papa, what do you mean?" I cried.

"Whom do I mean? Why, old Betsy, of course."

"Old Betsy! Oh, papa, that is too ridiculous; you're only laughing at me now, I see, but I won't be taken in."

"No, Trot, I'm not laughing. Old Betsy was the heroine I meant, when I told you that I would take you to see one."

I felt so disappointed that I could almost have cried.

"Oh, papa, you don't mean it."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I didn't really think you would have taken me in so horribly."

"I have not taken you in one bit, my child. Old Betsy is a true heroine, believe me."

I looked up into my father's face, for he spoke so earnestly that I could not think that he was joking; and yet it seemed almost impossible to believe him serious.

"Betsy a heroine?" said I. "Why, heroines, to begin with, are always young and beautiful, and Betsy is just nothing but an ugly old woman."

"Haven't you ever heard the saying that 'Handsome is as handsome does,' Trot?" asked my father. —
"Besides, as to that, however young heroines may be —
at one time, if they live long enough, they must grow —
old, you know. Would you consign all your favourite —
to early graves for the sake of preserving their heroic
character?"

"Well, I don't know; I never thought about that, papa."

"To be sure, it's rather an important matter; and I can assure you, I believe Betsy to have been young

once, though you mightn't think it to look at her now ; and as to beautiful—well, I don't know that I was ever particularly struck by her beauty as a little boy ; but perhaps I was not so keen on such matters as you, Trot, and she may have been a beauty for all I remember to the contrary."

"But I don't see that that proves her to be a heroine," said I.

"Certainly not. It only proves, I think, that, according to your own theory, there is no reason why she should not have been one. More than that, I know that she is one."

"Dear me, papa ! What a very queer sort of a heroine, to be sure ! What has she done to make her a heroine ? I should think, if she was one, anybody might be."

"Of course they might, if they liked."

"Might they ? I don't see that. I couldn't, for instance, put on armour and fight, like dear Joan of Arc ; or go out and save people, like Grace Darling, could I ? Who could I fight, and who could I save ?"

"Ah, Trot ! these are very large questions indeed,

and would require very large answers. I think we'd better stick to old Betsy for the present."

"Yes. Well, papa, what has Betsy done to make her a heroine?"

"My dear, she has done the most difficult thing in the whole world. She has, to the best of my belief, through all her life, done—her duty."

"Oh, papa! that's very uninteresting. I never heard before of a heroine who did her—duty."

"Didn't you?" said papa, laughing. "I'm sorry for your heroines, then."

"Oh, papa, you know what I mean! It's too bad of you to laugh."

"Well, so it is, Trot: I own it. But your face looked so wofully disappointed that it was impossible to help it."

"Duty seems such a very uninteresting sort of a — thing for a heroine to do," I said, meditatively.

"Well, perhaps you will be more inclined to regard poor Betsy in a favourable light, when I tell you that there really is a little bit of romance connected with her story."

"Is there?" Ah! I am glad of that. What is it, papa?"

"When Betsy left my mother's service, many years ago, she left it to be married to a farmer of the neighbourhood. He wasn't handsome, I'm afraid, Trot, nor even particularly young; so I suppose you won't think him much of a hero."

"Oh! well, never mind, papa; we must make the best of him," said I, with a sigh.

"That is just what Betsy was going to do," papa went on, "and I believe she was truly attached to him; but just before the wedding Betsy's sister died, leaving poor Sam, and all the rest of the children—quite little mites of things—with nobody but an idle, drunken father to look after them. So instead of marrying her farmer-hero, good Betsy went to her brother-in-law's house, and made herself into a sort of mother and slave to all these children, and a true mother she has been to them from that day to this."

"And what became of her husband that should have been, papa?"

"Well, he was at first very angry with Betsy for

deserting him in favour of her nephews and nieces, and quite heart-broken ; but as on reflection he wouldn't take the half-dozen children with Betsy, and as he couldn't get her without them, he by-and-by consoled himself by marrying somebody else."

"Well, he wasn't much of a hero, after all, was he, papa?"

"Perhaps not, my dear. You forgive him, then, for not being handsome?"

"Well, yes. After all, I think old Betsy is more interesting than he."

"I am glad you are coming to a due appreciation of my favourite heroine's claims."

"Is Betsy your very favourite heroine of all, papa?"

I asked: "I mean, supposing you were playing that game where you have to say who is your very *favourite* heroine and hero of all, and so on, do you think you would say old Betsy?"

"Well, really, Trot—perhaps I could hardly pledge myself to do that. I think I may be allowed to have a kind of reserved special heroine for such an occasion."

"And who is that? Oh! papa, do tell me," I cried.

"Umph! I don't know that it's fair to tell you all my secrets. You might be adopting my heroine as your own, and so taking a mean advantage of me."

"No, no, papa. Do tell me. Who is it that you like better than old Betsy, and that you think the greatest heroine in the world?"

"Well, Trot, if you will promise not to tell anybody, except mamma, you know, and we must not have any secrets from her——"

"No, no; well, go on, papa."

"Then my favourite heroine of all, whom I like a great deal better even than old Betsy, whom I admire more than anybody in the world, and whom I consider to be the very best woman that ever lived,—my special heroine, in fact, is—— Why, there she is!" exclaimed papa, as he looked up, and caught sight of mamma standing at the garden gate, shading her eyes from the sun.

"Yes; there's mamma."

"And my own special pet heroine," said papa.

This really was too funny.

"Mamma, mamma," I cried, running to her, "what do you think?—(you said I might tell mamma, you know),—what do you think? Papa says that you are his very favourite pet heroine of all, and that he likes you better than Joan of Arc, or Marie Antoinette, or even than old Betsy Lane."

"My dear child, what are you talking about?" asked mamma, all amazed, as one who hears the end of a story without the beginning. "I am sure I am very much obliged to papa for his good opinion."

"But he says you're a heroine, mamma."

"Does he? Well, I didn't know it; but it's only fair he should think so, since I have always looked upon him as something of a hero."

"A hero—papa a hero! Have you really? Well, that is curious! I never thought of papa like *that*."

This seemed to amuse my father very much.

"I daresay not," said he, laughing, as he put his arm round my mother, and we all turned to go into the house. "It's as hard for a man to be a hero in his own house as to be a prophet in his own country, I suppose."

"Unless those of his own house are specially giv—"

to hero-worship," said my mother, smiling up in his face. "But how is it that you are so full of heroes and heroines this morning?" she went on.

Then I told her about old Betsy, and about the way papa had taken me in.

"You bad child, I never took you in at all. I promised to show you a heroine, and I did show you one. I appeal to mamma. Am I to be abused?"

"Certainly not, under any circumstances," said mamma.

"But don't you think it a very funny thing, mamma, for a heroine to do her duty,—I mean, for you to be a heroine only because you do your duty?"

"Well, no, Trot. I don't think the greatest heroines of the world have ever done more."

"But then, mamma, don't you see, I can't make papa understand; but you will, I'm sure——"

"Thank you for that tribute to my intelligence," put in papa.

I went on without heeding him:

"Heroines are people who have done great out-of-the-way things, and not little every-day things."

"But after all, dear child, life is made up of little things, and that is what papa means. Little duties, little sacrifices, are always ready to hand; and papa thinks that a life full of these is a more heroic life than that which has only one big shining deed of heroism to show. Isn't that it, papa?"

"You have put it exactly, my dear."

"But then, mamma——"

"My dear Trot," said my father, "if you go on teasing your mother any more I shall have the right to style her *martyr* as well as heroine; and as I don't want her canonized just yet, I think you'd better go and take off your hat."

But that was by no means the last of our talks on the subject of heroes and heroines.

WYLDA'S RIDE.

WYLDA was a little girl, who, with a great many good qualities, possessed one which more than once brought her into difficulties,—and this was self-confidence.

Now, we can hardly call self-confidence a fault or a bad quality, because it is, to a certain extent, a most necessary and useful one ; and people who are wanting in it not only suffer a great deal of unnecessary pain and annoyance in their walk through the world, but are also often prevented by this want of confidence in themselves from becoming eminent men or women.

But self-confidence is one of those things of which it may be most emphatically said that “in modera-

tion is virtue," for from being a useful and valuable quality, it becomes, in excess, one of the most vicious, eating away all the good out of a person's character, and rendering him troublesome and ridiculous to every one about him.

Wylda, fortunately for herself and her friends, had not yet reached this terrible pass; but there is no knowing where she might have arrived, had she not received one or two salutary checks in her somewhat dangerous course. At school she was known as a *good guesser*,—a term which you will, if you have ever been to school, dear reader, understand. Wylda's talent consisted in never being at a loss with an answer. If she didn't know a thing, she guessed it, and looked as if she knew; and as she was sometimes fortunate enough to guess correctly, she often got the credit of knowing a great deal more than she really did. Sometimes, as may be imagined, she guessed quite wrong, and then a certain amount of confusion and ridicule did fall upon her; but even at such times Wylda knew how to extricate herself pretty cleverly, and her companions, better informed

but more diffident than she, were apt to envy, even while they laughed at, Wylda's assurance.

Wylda had a friend—of course : who could be at school without a friend ? Her name was Gertrude ; and the two were very devoted to one another. They sat together, they did their lessons together, they played together, they made all manner of monograms of W and G twisted this way and that, they learned duets on the piano, and though they quarrelled a little sometimes, they always made it up again ; so that they may be considered a very model pair of friends indeed. Wylda was the ruling spirit, the bravest and the cleverest ; but it may be doubted whether she did not owe more, perhaps, than she would have been willing to confess, to the plodding industry of her less brilliant companion.

"I never saw any one so clever as you, Wylda !" Gertrude would say to her sometimes. "You seem to know everything : " not, in her zealous admiration of her friend, perceiving that Wylda's knowledge was often only the gleanings of her own conscientious hard work. In truth, Gertrude had the greatest

confidence in her friend's powers, and was willing to accord her something more than silent worship. And Wylda, on her part, was not ungrateful for this homage, nor was she wanting in a kind of chivalrous devotion for her true lover and humble adorer. Granted her own superiority, she was then ever foremost in proclaiming the merits, amiability, talents, and beauty of her friend; was ready to fight all manner of battles for her, and even to quarrel with her vigorously, if through modesty or forgetfulness she failed in maintaining the high position in the school which Wylda was determined that, as her chosen friend, she should hold.

It was at the end of their first year of school life and first "half" of friendship that Wylda was, at her friend's urgent entreaty, invited to pass a portion of the holidays at the house of Gertrude's parents.

When the letter came from Gertrude's mother, Mrs. Rogers, announcing to her little daughter that "Your friend Wylda's mamma is very pleased that she should pay us a visit this summer," the delight

of the two girls knew no bounds, and Miss Parsewell's usually decorous establishment was quite upset by their boisterous mirth.

"Isn't it nice?" cried one.

"Delightful!" returned the other. "Shan't we have fun?"

"Yes."

"And were you ever in Devonshire before?"

"N—no." Wylda hardly liked confessing to the fact. In truth, she was a town-child born and bred, but was, for some unknown and undiscoverable reason, a little ashamed of the fact.

"Oh! it is so lovely. The hills, and the lanes, and the flowers, and the ferns! What a deal I shall have to show you, shan't I?"

"Yes," said Wylda.

"And how they will all admire you at home—papa and mamma, and the boys, and Phœbe!" Phœbe was Gertrude's elder sister.

"Do you think your sister Phœbe will like me?" asked sharp-witted Wylda.

"Oh! I'm sure she will. Nobody could help it,

who sees you, dear. They will all adore you, I know," was Gertrude's affectionate answer.

This prospect was a pleasant one, certainly. Wylda liked being adored. She was not quite so sure whether she would like being patronized or shown about by Gertrude—who was, to begin with, a year and a half younger than herself—but, on the whole, she agreed with her friend, that it would be *great fun*. And every spare moment of the next three weeks was spent by the two little girls in eager anticipation of "what we shall do at Beechwood," and of the delights and pleasures in store.

"I wish you were coming home with me now at once," sighed Gertrude, when they were bidding on another adieu on the breaking-up day. "It's dreadful to think that I shan't see you for nearly a whole month. I shan't know what to do with myself."

"You can write to me," returned Wylda, cheerfully.

"Oh yes, of course. I will write every day a little bit—a sort of journal, you know—and you do the same, won't you? and then we shall

everything that the other has been doing and thinking all the time."

This seemed to both the friends a most charming arrangement ; and by means of it, and an alarming expenditure of postage stamps, the month's absence was rendered endurable.

"A month all but a day!" exclaimed Gertrude, as she at length embraced her friend with much warmth on the platform of the Beechwood station, where, together with a black box, she had been duly delivered by the guard, under whose care she had made her journey.

"Yes, it seems ages, Gertie dear," said Wylda. "I do believe you've grown."

"No! do you really? Oh you darling, I am so glad to see you!" returned Gertrude. "And now let me introduce you to all my people. Here, mamma," she cried, "here is my very dearest friend—the best, cleverest, nicest girl that ever was ; and this"—taking Wylda's hand and dragging her up in front of a stout, pleasant-looking gentleman—"is my papa ; and this young lady here is my sister Phœbe ; and

then there are the boys—Will and Herbert, where are they? Oh! well, you'll find us all out in time, dear, and we're all so glad to see you—you don't know."

Wylda's welcome was certainly not wanting in kindness from any one member of the family, though it was scarcely to be expected, or perhaps—desired, that Mr. and Mrs. or Miss Rogers should be quite so ecstatic in their reception of their young visitor as their little daughter had been. But the one and all made much of her, and exerted themselves to make her feel at her ease—a process which in this case did not present any very peculiar difficulties, as Wylda was happily not of a shy disposition. Before the first evening was over, she was as much at home with her new acquaintances as though she had passed half her life among them.

They, on their part, were enchanted with her. Gertrude's papa, a genial English squire, declared her to be "as nice and sensible a little girl as he had seen this many a day." Will, Gertie's eldest brother, made up his mind to marry her as soon as

he was grown up. Herbert, his younger brother, not knowing of Will's resolve, determined on the same course. Mrs. Rogers thought her well-mannered and intelligent ; and if Phoebe was not quite so enthusiastic in her praises as the rest of the family, she at least had nothing to say against her young sister's friend, but pronounced her to be "a nice child enough." So that, altogether, Wylda was a success at Beechwood, and Gertrude lived in a state of triumphant delight.

As for Wylda herself, it need scarcely be said that she was happy. She liked nothing so much as being made much of—being appreciated, perhaps she would have said ; and she was all the more ready to be pleased with the attentions of her new friends, from the fact that for the last month—that is, during her stay at her own home—she had been, as she thought, rather unduly suppressed. As one of the younger members of a large, struggling family, she naturally had to put up with some small rubs. "Mamma thinks only of the boys, and the boys think only of themselves," she would say sometimes, when speaking of her home affairs. At home she was

expected to play that part in the social concert which is familiarly called "second fiddle,"—but the instrument was not very much to the young lady's liking, and she found the atmosphere of Beechwood very much more to her taste.

She was not a little pleased, too, with the luxury by which she was here surrounded. Never had Wylda before lived in a state of so much magnificence; but she was not in the least embarrassed by any novelties with which she might meet, but carried herself with an air of quiet dignity which impressed even Mrs. Rogers' French maid with a notion that she was a young lady "of consequence."

The only annoyance which Wylda experienced arose from her utter ignorance of country ways and things. As she had lived all her life in the heart of London, and rarely visited the country, except for a month once or twice at Margate or Ramsgate, this was not to be wondered at.

But Wylda's peculiarity was, that she could not endure confessing ignorance of anything; consequently she tried her guessing plan in this instance, and

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talked with *an air* of crops, and flowers, and all manner of things of which she knew nothing—not without success in some instances, gleaning knowledge as she went. But she made a few unfortunate blunders—calling, for instance, the geese on the pond swans, and admiring carrot-tops as beautiful ferns—to the extreme amusement even of her faithful friend and humble worshipper, Gertrude. And to be laughed at was always most unpleasant to Wylda; but to be laughed at by Gertrude was beyond endurance!

Still, on the whole, life at Beechwood was a pleasant enough thing to Wylda, and the account which, on the third day of her visit, she wrote home, describing all her doings and surroundings, was glowing in the extreme.

It was on the morning after this that the subject of a ride was broached at breakfast.

“Who’s going to the meet to-morrow?” asked the Squire, cheerily. “Gertie, child, I know you’d like to be there, on Blanche; and if our little lady here would enjoy a ride with you, I should think Prince

Charlie would carry her nicely. What do you say? would you like it, my dear?"

"Oh, I should like it of all things," said Wylda, promptly—so promptly that Mrs. Rogers felt rather ashamed of herself for asking,—

"I suppose you can ride, my dear—I mean, are ~~you~~ you accustomed to do so? You are not timid?"

"No, I think not," says Wylda, blushing a little ;
"I have not ridden much, but——"

The genial voice of her host interrupts her.

"Ride! of course she can ride: I can see it in her eye! I expect she could take a horse across country as well as any of us—eh, my dear! Only think of a fine, intelligent girl like that not being able to ride!" laughed the hearty Squire.

After this it was really not to be expected that Wylda should confess that her equestrian performances had hitherto been confined to donkey gallops along Ramsgate sands. Her spirit rose with the occasion. She would be equal to any demands which were made upon her. And, besides, where was the difficulty? What Gertrude could do, surely she w

capable of. She had always had a great desire to ride, and "If I say I don't know anything about it, they won't like me to try," she argued, shrewdly enough. And there was no fear, she thought, but that she should "get along somehow."

"Prince Charlie will carry her like a lamb," said the Squire.

"Well, my dear, I don't know," said his wife; "he is rather troublesome to mount sometimes, and——"

"Pshaw! mere playfulness; not a bit of vice about him."

"And then the crowd at the meet always makes the horses a little fidgety, doesn't it?"

"I know somebody else who is fidgety, too," said Mr. Rogers, winking slyly at his wife; "an infant might mount the Prince in safety. But I tell you what,—let the girls have an hour's quiet ride this afternoon, and then little Missy here will see how she and her horse agree. Eh, what do you think of that? Perhaps I may be able to go with them."

So it was arranged—Wylda acquiescing in everything, and beaming over with pleasure. How nice

it would be to write home and tell them all about it, she thought.

"I am so glad that you are going to have a ride with me, darling," said little Gertrude to her friend, when the plan of operations was fixed. "It will be so nice; but I didn't know you could."

"Didn't you? And why shouldn't I, as well as you?" asked Wylda, a little haughtily.

Which argument was quite unanswerable.

"No, of course not. How stupid of me! What a girl you are, Wylda! I do believe there's nothing in the world you couldn't do," exclaimed Gertie, admiringly.

Wylda smiled a pretty little deprecating smile, and kissed her friend to intimate that her rash speech was forgiven.

Wylda was perfectly delighted with herself when she saw her reflexion in the wardrobe looking-glass, arrayed in sister Phœbe's riding costume. She trailed the long habit about the floor, then caught it gracefully up, and turned and twisted herself this way and that, in very great satisfaction.

"How I wish they could see me at home now!" she thought.

Gertrude came running into the room in her habit to see her friend.

"Are you ready?" and "Oh you darling, how nice you do look! How well Phœbe's habit does for you, and how becoming it is, too!" she cried.

"Is it? Yes, I think a habit does suit me," said Wylda, placidly. But her heart did fail her a little when, having walked to the stable yard to mount, as was the old-established custom at Beechwood, she saw Prince Charlie, tall, black, and shiny, ready saddled, awaiting her.

"Isn't it a very tall horse?" she asked, a little falteringly, wondering how in the world she would ever get on his back.

"No, miss, not partickalar," said the groom, who was holding him.

"I'll mount first, dear," said Gertie, "because Prince is rather fidgety if he is kept waiting. What a pity papa can't come with us, after all, isn't it? However, John will take care of us."

Meanwhile, the little lady had vaulted lightly into her saddle.

"You had better take Prince Charlie to the mounting-block," said Mrs. Rogers, who had accompanied the little girls to the stable yard. "He is less likely to fidget, and Miss Elliot will get more comfortably seated."

Prince Charlie was, however, not to be cheated out of his little bit of innocent play, block or no block, and it was more by good luck than good management that Wylda found herself at last seated, not *very* securely, on his back.

• Does he always toss his head about like that? she wondered.

"This is the curb, miss," said the groom, as he gave the reins into her hands. "I think you'd better ride him on the snaffle."

"Oh! very well. Am I on it all right now?" said poor Wylda, clutching rather hard at the reins, and wondering whether "the snaffle" was another word for saddle.

Prince Charlie began dancing about in a most unpleasant manner.

"Don't curb him up like that. Give him more head, miss," cried the groom, taking hold of the bridle, to Wylda's intense relief.

"Whatever makes him go on in this way?" she asked, almost with tears in her eyes.

"Let him go easy, miss, and he'll be all right," said the man; "he takes a light hand, does the Prince. See, I'll hold his head a bit."

"You don't feel frightened, my dear, do you?" asked Mrs. Rogers; "because, if so, don't you go on, on any account."

"Oh! no, I—I'm not frightened, thank you," said Wylda, biting her lips, to bring back the colour which she felt had forsaken them.

"Would you," asked Gertie, who was now by her side, "would you like John to take you with the leading rein? If you don't feel quite comfortable, I would."

"Do *you* have it?" asked Wylda.

"Oh no," said Gertie, smiling at the notion.

"Then why should I? No, thank you; I'd rather not."

The two horses were now going along quietly enough

side by side, and the groom had left hold of the Prince's head.

"That's all right—now we shall go on well enough," said Gertrude. "I hope we shall have a nice ride."

"Yes—but see, he's beginning to shake his head again."

"It's because you've got him on the curb too much. And, dear me, what a funny way you hold him!" exclaimed Gertrude.

"Do I? Oh! I see you hold the reins differently; but there are always a great many ways of doing the same things—aren't there? I daresay it's all the same in the end," said Wylda.

"Oh! perhaps so," assented Gertrude. "Shall we have a little gentle trot in this field?"

The two horses set off together. But Wylda, at least, did not find the exercise a particularly gentle one. She was bumped remorselessly up and down with every movement of her steady-going steed, until her very bones seemed to shake within her. She clung to her saddle with what force she might, with knees and hands, but unable to convince herself that the next

jerk would not unseat her. Her breath went—her side ached—still she held on. Gertrude turned round to her.

"Isn't it nice?" she said. "The air is so fresh to-day, and—— But dear me, Wylda, are you ill? Stop, stop," she cried; "I believe you're going to faint."

Wylda made a desperate effort to pull Prince up, by clutching spasmodically at the curb, but unfortunately, at the same moment, gave him a sharp cut, quite unintentionally, on the flank with her whip. The horse, unused to such bungling treatment, irritated by the awkwardness of his rider, longing for nothing better than a good canter over the pleasant field-grass, did exactly that which Wylda would have desired him not to do. Instead of stopping, he gave his head a shake, which jerked the reins out of his rider's hands, set off at a sharper trot than before, and, feeling himself utterly uncontrolled, he presently changed his pace into something merging on a gallop.

"Wylda! Wylda!" cried Gertrude, reining up

Blanche, and gazing horror-stricken at her friend's wild career,—for she saw that she had completely lost control over her horse.

John, the groom, rode quickly up to his young mistress. "Don't you be afeared, miss; she be all right if she only knows how to sit on him," he said.

But unfortunately that was the very thing that Wylda did not know. And at last the high courage that had, so far, stood her in good stead, failed her. At a sudden swerve, which the horse made, she lost heart and hold together; she fell all in a heap on the ground, with her head against a stone.

Gertrude cried bitterly when, on riding up to the spot, poor Wylda was taken up, senseless and wounded, and insisted upon it that her friend was dead.

Fortunately no such direful tragedy followed on Wylda's ride; though a sprained foot and a cut forehead are in themselves quite sufficiently serious results: not to speak of a scar over the left eyebrow, which certainly no young lady would desire to have!

But we are happy to think that other results than these followed on this day's experience: that by it Wylda was taught more than one lesson useful to her in after life—learning, as we most of us do, only by our own downfalls, the grace of sweet humility.

AUNT EUPHEMIA'S CABINET.

I WAS quite a child when the first invitation came for me to visit my aunt Euphemia; but though it is so many years ago, I can remember all the circumstances just as though they had occurred yesterday.

We were at tea when old Martha brought in the letter, and giving it to "the master," informed him that the young man on horseback would call for the answer in an hour's time. The letter, I remember, had a big red seal on the outside of it, at which papa looked with a curious half-smiling face before he unfolded it. For that was before the days of envelopes, and the letter was written as letters used to be then, on a large square sheet of paper, folded, tucked in, and sealed. Then he read it, still with a

funny little smile on his face, and instead of refolding it, he passed it on to mother.

"Bessie dear, you must do as you think best, of course ; but if you can consent to it, I think—yes, I think—I should like the child to go," he said.

Then mother read the letter once or twice over, and while she was doing so, I fancied that papa watched her just a little anxiously. In a minute or two, however, she rose to give the paper to him, and leaning over the back of his chair, whispered some little word in his ear. He, I remember, caught her hand as she stood behind him, held it a moment, and pressed it to his lips. Then presently turning towards me, he said,—

"And so, Trot, you are to go on a visit to your Aunt Euphemia."

"Who, papa ?"

"Your aunt, my dear,—Miss Euphemia Markham."

"Papa! I never heard of her! How can she be my aunt?" I said, wondering.

"Ah! little woman," returned papa, with one of his funny smiles, "life has many surprises in store for

you. May none be more disagreeable than the discovery of an unknown rich old aunt. By-the-bye," went on my father, "I should have said your great-aunt, Trot: Miss Euphemia is aunt to me."

Somehow the notion of papa having an aunt was too funny. We all laughed; the boys and I, at least. For our ideas of an aunt were of our mother's younger sisters—our pet romps and playmates, bright frolicsome girls scarcely more sedate than ourselves. And papa always seemed so very, very old to us. But I fancied that papa looked at us with some surprise, as though he could not understand what the joke was.

"What nonsense are you up to, children?" he asked, looking over his eye-glasses. "Why do you all sit giggling there without saying what it is?"

There was really nothing to say; so of course we all looked rather foolish.

Mother came in to the rescue, as she always did.

"I think they have done their tea, William, and want to be off for a romp. Away with you then, monkeys!" she said, smiling at us with her dear kind eyes.

Off we flew, the boys, Dolly, and I, a scampering noisy crew, up the shallow oak stairs to our own special haunt, the room that we still in fond remembrance called the nursery. There, seated on the floor in a semicircle round the high green fender, we held a family council of fun, and among other subjects discussed, of course, the newly-discovered Great-aunt Euphemia. By-and-by mother came in and sat in her favourite low chair in the midst of us. But that made no difference as far as our merriment went; her presence was no restraint upon us, and we laughed and talked all together, and were very happy.

Before I go any farther, I think I must try to describe our mother, only it is so very difficult. It seems to me that there are no words in the world which describe her half so well as her own sweet name. She was just *mother*! Mother, and nothing else. She was very beautiful. She is, to this day—for, thank God, she is still with me—beautiful, in spite of her silvered hair and seventy years, or rather, perhaps, because of them. But at the time of which I am writing, she was quite young. I don't know

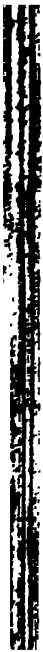
how it was, I don't think papa was so very many years older than mother, but we always thought him quite old, quite far away from us. But mother was always just our own age. When we were children, she was a child too; when we were girls and boys she was a girl; when we grew to be young men and women, she was a young woman too. She was never far away from any one of us, but always just the very age at all times to be our dearest friend and confidante.

But to return. The days following the receipt of Aunt Euphemia's letter were spent in a state of excitement and preparation. Several additions and alterations had to be made to my small wardrobe. My beaver bonnet, just come home from the cleaner, had to be decorated with its winter trimming of coral velvet. My second best frock—a green plaid one, I remember—had to have a tuck let down, and my new frock an extra one made in it. Mother sat stitching away from morning till evening, I by her side, helping her in my small way, and chatting.

"Mother, am I only to take my two best frocks?" I asked, on the last day.



l, there was the cabinet, stored from end to end and from top to bottom with antique china.



"Yes, dear ; you must look nice while you are with your aunt : and mind, Nelly darling, you take great pains to be neat and tidy."

"Yes, dear mother, I will try to remember. Only how shall I know what to do or say without you ? I shall feel—— Oh ! mother, how shall I feel when I haven't got you to come to for everything ?"

Suddenly it seemed to overwhelm me, the sense of coming isolation and loneliness, and my heart rushed up into my throat and stayed there. Somehow, in the new excitement of this visit, the idea that I should have to go away alone, and leave all my dear home belongings, had not occurred to me painfully. But now the misery of the thought fairly overcame me. I threw my arms round my mother's neck.

"I can't go, mother ; I can't indeed," I sobbed.

Mother was a little overcome too, I think, for she spoke quite in a different voice from her usual one.

"Don't say that, dearest. Papa wishes you to go, and so do I. But my little girl will not forget her mother," she said, pressing me to her fondly.

"Forget ! Oh ! mother dear——"

"No, no ; I mean," said mother, going on a little hurriedly, "I should like your aunt to think that you have been well brought up, you know. And mind, Nelly darling, if you are not happy you are to come back instantly. Do you hear—instantly?"

"Yes, mother."

The next day, pressing my nose flat against the nursery window, with my beaver bonnet and pelisse on, I saw a large yellow carriage with two horses stop in front of our house, and a tall, severe-looking lady, in black silk, step out.

"Mother, mother—look, look!" I cried. "Here is Great-aunt Euphemia come for me."

"No, my dear ; I think that must be Mrs. White, your aunt's maid."

"Oh!" said I, in an awestruck voice. If Great aunt Euphemia's maid was such an imposing person what would Great-aunt Euphemia herself be?

I don't think I ever quite got over the awe with which Mrs. White inspired me. Very alarming indeed she appeared to me that day—at least, when, good-byes all said, I found myself rolling along

the comfortable old carriage on my way to Aunt Euphemia's, with Mrs. White, stern and composed, seated opposite me.

I was anything but composed. I would have given the world for a good hearty cry. But that, I knew, would have been strangely beneath my dignity, and I restrained myself, swallowing down my tears, and trying to divert my thoughts from painful topics by a minute investigation of the person and toilette of the solemn-looking individual opposite me. So absorbed did I become that I quite started when, after a lengthened silence, Mrs. White addressed me.

"Your ma seems a very pleasing and agreeable person, miss."

Something in the tone of the remark jarred upon me horribly, though I hardly knew what it was. I coloured to the roots of my hair, and stammered out some confused reply.

"I suppose you don't see a great deal of her family, miss?" she said again.

"Whose family? Mother's?" I asked. "Dear me, yes; I should think so. Fancy not seeing much of

Aunt Kitty, and Aunt Nelly, and Uncle Mark! Why, of course we're always seeing them. And grandfather, — well, you know, since he has had the gout so badly, he can't come to us much, but we are always running in to pay him little visits, and he is so kind—gives us such nice lozenges and sweets and things. You know him, don't you? At least you must know where he lives, close to us at the corner of High Street, because there is his name over the door—'John Thompson, chemist and druggist.' Everybody who comes to Brocklehurst knows him, I think, and everybody is so fond of him."

In my enthusiasm about my mother's family I quite forgot, for the moment, the awe I had been feeling for my sedate companion, until her freezing response, and the peculiarly pursed-up expression of her mouth as she spoke, recalled my earlier tremors.

"Well, Miss Ellinor, if I was you, I wouldn't say no more about my ma's family than I could help to madam. She mightn't like it."

"Oh! Mrs. White, why not?" I was beginning, when the carriage rolled in through some large

gates, and in another moment stopped before a long low brick house, with a double row of high narrow white-sashed windows, whose countless panes were glittering in the pale winter afternoon sun.

"This is your aunt's residence, Miss Ellinor," observed Mrs. White, somewhat pompously.

As we drew up, the green hall door opened, without any process of knocking or ringing, and Mrs. White, getting out of the carriage, offered to help me. I quite intended, I know, to have stepped out in a graceful and dignified manner ; but not being much accustomed to stepping in and out of carriages, and having somewhat miscalculated the distance from the ground, I very nearly fell headlong. Mrs. White's strong arm, however, prevented that catastrophe, though the jolt shook and considerably disconcerted me. Summoning up all the resolution of which I was possessed, I walked up the steps and into the square hall.

"Madam is in the blue chamber," observed the man-servant.

"Will you follow me, Miss Ellinor ?" said Mrs.

White, leading the way. I followed as I was bid. Indeed, I was beginning to feel that, in spite of her severe manner, she was my only friend in this strange land—the only link between it and my old home.

At the end of two or three long dark passages we came to a door. Mrs. White knocked. There was the sound of a curtain being drawn back, and then we entered round a large folding screen.

“Madam, here is Miss Ellinor,” said Mrs. White.

The room was almost dark save for the firelight, which shed a weird half-glow, half-shadow upon ceiling and wall ; and at the moment I believed it to be untenanted, until a shrill little voice, coming from the darkest corner, replied, and the shadow of a little figure emerged into the circle of the firelight glow.

“Why hasn’t John brought the lamps, White?” said the little voice. “Asleep! did you say? No, I’ve not been asleep, and don’t wish to go. You know I never sleep after dinner.”

As she spoke, John, I suppose, and the lamps made their appearance, and threw a fuller light upon the scene.

All this while, I had been standing shy and unnoticed at the farther end of the room ; but as Mrs. White now completed her formal introduction by saying to me, "Miss Ellinor, there is your aunt," I went up to the little old lady, and putting out my hand, said, "How do you do, Great-aunt Euphemia?"

At this the little old lady burst out laughing—a merry, ringing laugh, like a girl's.

"Bless the child ! what makes her call me that ?" she said : "Little Aunt Euphemia would be more to the purpose, wouldn't it, White?"

Certainly never was such a tiny atom of a great-aunt seen. She looked like some little girl dressed up, for fun, in an old woman's clothes, and yet her dress was scarcely that of an old woman. It was of the palest grey satin, made quite short in front, so as to show a still shapely foot and ankle, and low at the neck, over which were arranged folds upon folds of the snowiest muslin and lace. Her cap, also of finest lace, was in the fashion, I believe, called mob ; and her hair, which was still more golden than grey, was

arranged in a variety of small curls on the top of her head, coming low down on her white unwrinkled forehead. She was, in fact, the prettiest, daintiest little picture possible,—about as unlike the Great-aunt Euphemia I had been imagining as it was well possible to conceive. But in spite of diminutive stature she was possessed of a wonderful amount of dignity—a dignity that seemed born of her perfect proportions and grace. She would have made most other people, I think, look overgrown and clumsy beside her. Upon myself the effect was indescribable. I became suddenly conscious, in her presence, of arms, hands, legs, and feet, which had never troubled me particularly before, but which now were a perfect burden to me.

Tea came. Not such a tea as we had at home, but a dainty arrangement of delicate Japanese crockery on a tiny black-and-gold table, which was placed on the hearthrug just in front of my aunt's chair. Alas for me! The cups were wanting in what I had always thought the peculiar property of cups—handles; and my discomforts were largely increased

by that circumstance. Besides, it is a somewhat difficult matter for any little girl to sit on a rather high chair, hold a cup and saucer, and at the same time eat a very thin slice of bread and butter, elegantly.

Indeed, tea-drinking is in itself an art which requires considerable practice to attain anything like perfection in. I remember how forcibly this idea struck me for the first time on this particular evening. Never before had I felt any great difficulty in drinking tea. Nor was I in the habit of whistling it into my mouth, as is the fashion with some people, or of clattering the cup against my teeth, as is the custom of others. My difficulty was, that, in trying to swallow the soothing beverage, it would not go quietly and peaceably down my throat, but made a horrible gurgle that resounded painfully in the still room, and almost caused me to drop both cup and saucer out of my hand.

I saw that my aunt's little bright eyes were watching my every word and movement, and I must say I felt extremely uncomfortable in consequence. But I

am sure Miss Markham had no intention of alarming me. On the contrary, she wished, I know, to be extremely kind; and when tea was removed, she bade me take a small stool by her side, and as I sat there she patted my head kindly with one of her small gloved hands. She had only removed her gloves for a few seconds during tea.

"Now talk to me, child," she said.

Thus commanded, I found it somewhat difficult to obey. "What about, Aunt Euphemia?" asked I, dropping the *great*.

"Oh! tell me all about yourself," suggested my aunt.

I tried my best, but I am afraid I was not very amusing, for in a short time I observed Miss Markham's eyes closing and her head nodding gently. Then she roused herself. "You can be quiet now for a bit, my dear. I am not going to sleep—I never can sleep except in my bed—so that you need not be afraid of disturbing me. But I am going to close my eyes a little, just to rest them, and you can amuse yourself with a book or anything you like."

In another minute my aunt's regular sonorous breathing told me that if not sleep, something very like it had taken possession of the good old lady. I crept softly away to look for a book or some kind of amusement for my hungry wide-awake young mind. The books on the round table in the centre of the room did not prove much to my taste, but the room itself was a perfect treasure-house of knickknacks and curiosities.

Above all, there was the cabinet, a black-and-gold cabinet,—*dresser* I called it then, in my youthful ignorance,—stored from end to end and from top to bottom with antique china—a whole service ; plates, dishes, soup tureen, sauce-boats, all were there, and on each separate piece of china was an exquisitely designed and coloured picture. It was a perfect art gallery.

It was not until I had made a tour of the room that I discovered this store of wonders, for the room was of an irregular shape, and the cabinet was placed so that the light of the oriel window might fall well upon it, and was out of sight of the corner by the

fireplace, where my aunt and I had been sitting. But once discovered, I was riveted to the spot. First on my knees on the floor, then on tiptoe, then mounted on a footstool, in order to inspect closer, I gazed entranced.

Presently my aunt's voice startled me. "Where are you, child, and what are you doing? Are you reading?"

"Yes, Aunt Euphemia."

"What?"

"Oh! Aunt Euphemia, I am reading the stories from the plates and dishes on the dresser," I said. "They are so beautiful."

"So they are, child: ha, ha, ha!" laughed my aunt; "you like them, do you?" And then she laughed again, her bright ringing laugh like a girl's. "The plates and dishes on the dresser, indeed! But you've good taste, I see. Where do you get it from? Come here and tell me. You're not like William,—your father, I mean. Are you like your mother, eh?"

"Oh no, indeed, Aunt Euphemia," I said, coming

up to her, and becoming once more terribly conscious of my arms and legs under the gaze of her keen eyes. "Oh no, I'm not a bit like mother; I'm just a great awkward, stupid girl, you see, but mother—oh! if you only knew her, Aunt Euphemia! She's the sweetest, loveliest, dearest darling in all the world—not an atom like me, I assure you."

"Well, well," said Aunt Euphemia, "whoever you take after, child, I like you. Only don't call my cabinet a dresser any more, and now go to bed."

So ended the first day of my visit at Great-aunt Euphemia's.

The next day, and the day after, and the day after that, passed away monotonously enough. There was little of change or excitement in that quiet old house, and I must confess that at times the dulness of it oppressed me terribly. I missed the stir, the life and bustle of my own humbler home; I missed the boys, I missed my little sister Dolly, and above all I missed my mother. There was very little of occupation, or amusement either, for me in my aunt's

house. My chief attraction and delight still continued to be the old cabinet with its store of delicate china. I came to know each separate plate and dish. Each had its own interest for me. Each separate picture was the groundwork of a fresh romance which I treasured up in my mind for future use. I had always been the tale-teller of the family. And as hour after hour the threads of my stories spun themselves in my active young brain, I pleased myself with imagining how, when I should tell them all, in the glow of the nursery fire at home, Bob would laugh here, Dolly clap her hands there, or Willy shiver with fright. For my stories of course had to be varied in kind: some tender, some horrible, some comic, so as to suit my audience; but all of them intensely exciting, marvellous, and utterly impossible, and abounding in fairies and princesses. There was one I made up, all about the big dish on the top of the cabinet, which I called "The Deserted Ship, or the Castaway Voyagers," which I knew would please Bob, because he was going to be a sailor; and "The Enchanted Pony, or the Fortunes of Tom Ventureall," I thought

of entirely on Mark's account, because he was such a boy for doing daring and out-of-the-way things.

It was, I think, on the fourth day of my visit to my aunt that I was sitting alone in the blue room, crouched down on the floor opposite my favourite cabinet, and I was just putting together a fairy tale for Dolly, beginning with two little girls who were lost in a wood, when my aunt, with another old lady, a visitor, came into the room. They did not see me, and went up to the fireplace at once, and began talking. Glad to escape observation, for I was still shy and frightened, I crept farther into the corner. The conversation of the two old ladies was not very amusing to me, and I scarcely listened to it, until I was suddenly attracted by the mention of my father's name. The visitor-lady had asked after him, I think.

"Oh, what do you think? One of his children is staying here at this very time," said my aunt.

"No, really! I'm glad of that. So you mean to make it up with him and receive him and his wife, do you?"

LITTLE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHILD.

"His wife! No, that's impossible. I'll never forgive him. What right had he, to run counter to all my wishes, and to disgrace his family by bringing a low-born, under-bred woman like that into it? A tradesman's daughter! Such a thing was never heard of in our family before. The wives of the Markhams have at least always been ladies."

Higher and higher the blood was mounting in my cheeks, neck, and brow. It was *mother*, my mother, that Miss Markham was speaking of so contemptuously. My *mother*! I could not bear it! I forgot all my timidity, all my discretion. I stalked out from my corner, my face aflame, my hands clenched tightly together.

"I have heard all you have said, Aunt Euphemia," said I, "about my mother; and how dare you say she isn't a lady?" I was almost choking with passion. "How can you say things that are so unkind, so cruel, so untrue? And—and will you please send me home at once? I don't want to stop here any I'd rather go back to—to my mother."

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Here my excitement fairly overcame me, and I burst into tears.

Aunt Euphemia said not a word in reply. I think she must have been startled by this sudden indignant apparition,—by the sudden transition of the trembling child into the vengeful, impassioned woman. But her face, if a little paler than usual, showed no emotion. She rose and quietly rang the bell.

“Let the carriage come round at once to take Miss Ellinor home,” she said. “And tell White to pack up her trunk.”

I retreated sobbing once more to my corner, and the visitor-lady prepared to take her leave. For a little while we stayed, my aunt and I, perfectly silent—she in her usual seat by the fire, I in my favourite corner by the cabinet,—I, sullen and resentful, and yet already a little ashamed of my late violence. What had I said? Had I been rude to my aunt? I asked myself one minute. And if so, did she not deserve it, and bring it on herself? I answered the next. Had she not spoken ill of mother?

"Ellinor," said my aunt at last.

I rose and went to her.

"I hear the carriage coming round. Are you going to say good-bye to me? Are we going to part enemies or friends?"

"I don't know, Aunt Euphemia," said I, softening a little; "you see I can't be friends with anybody who isn't friends with mother."

"Do you know you were very rude to me just now, Ellinor? Do you know that you spoke to me as no little girl ought to speak to an old woman?"

"I am very sorry, Aunt Euphemia; only you see you had spoken ill of mother, and you shouldn't have done that."

"No, you are right. As a guest in my house I ought not to have insulted you. I beg your pardon, my dear."

I don't know quite how it all happened, but in a moment I found myself with my arms round Aunt Euphemia's neck. If I had thought of it, I am sure should never have ventured to do such a thing:

but I did not think,—I only felt ; and sometimes, let wise folks say what they will, feeling does just as well as thinking, or better. I was crying, and so I think was Aunt Euphemia.

“There, there!” said my aunt, kissing me and patting me kindly, “I think, after all, we only want to understand one another, and to know one another a little better, eh?”

“Oh! Aunt Euphemia, and if you only knew my mother, how you and she would love one another! Dear, dear! what a pity it is you don’t!” I cried, quite oppressed with the regret which has since often occurred again to me,—the regret that so many of the best and noblest of the world live their lives on side by side, and do not come to know or to appreciate, each the other. But surely it will be one of Heaven’s happiest surprises to meet there as friends those whom we thought, perhaps, our bitterest enemies, because we did not know them; to find that, all opposed to us as we thought them, they were yet working with us, marching the same road, owning the same Lord, bound with the same love.

But I am always deeply thankful that my mother and my dear Aunt Euphemia did not wait to make their friendship in another world, but found one another out, at last, in this.

"You had better go home now, Ellinor, my dear," my aunt said to me on that same day of our great quarrel and reconciliation. "But you shall come again if you like, if there is anything—you—you would like to see again, you know," looking towards the cabinet. "And you can bring your mother to see it too."

I threw my arms once more round the dear old lady's neck.

"Oh! dear Aunt Euphemia. You mean the plates and dishes, don't you? And I love them dearly, but I'd much rather come to see you, and so would mother, too," I cried. "You're ever so much dearer than the plates and dishes."

But after all it was to see "your daughter's favourite plates and dishes" that my mother was first invited to pay a visit to Aunt Euphemia. There was some difficulty, some prejudice, some pride to be

overcome at first on each side, even on my mother's : even she was not quite an angel. But the wall of separation once broken through, one stone after another was in time pulled down, until at length these two noble and true natures stood revealed to one another, heart to heart and face to face. When Aunt Euphemia died, she lay pillowed in my mother's arms.

That is long years ago, now, and other changes and many have come since then. Some have passed away out of the then home circle. Papa lies in the great family vault beside poor Aunt Euphemia. The boys are scattered abroad. Bright Bob has found a sailor's grave far out at sea. Dolly is married, and tells fairy tales on her own account to eager little listeners. In the old home, only mother and I are left, but so long as Heaven spares us to each other, we have little to ask for. And in the place of honour in our favourite sitting-room stands the old cabinet, Aunt Euphemia's special bequest to me. There it is, still perfect, with all its array of delicate porcelain, just as when first it took my

childish fancy—not a platter chipped or cracked. Need I say that no hands but my own are ever permitted to touch it, and that of all the treasures in which I take an old-maidenly pride and delight, I love my plates and dishes the best ?

THE END.

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